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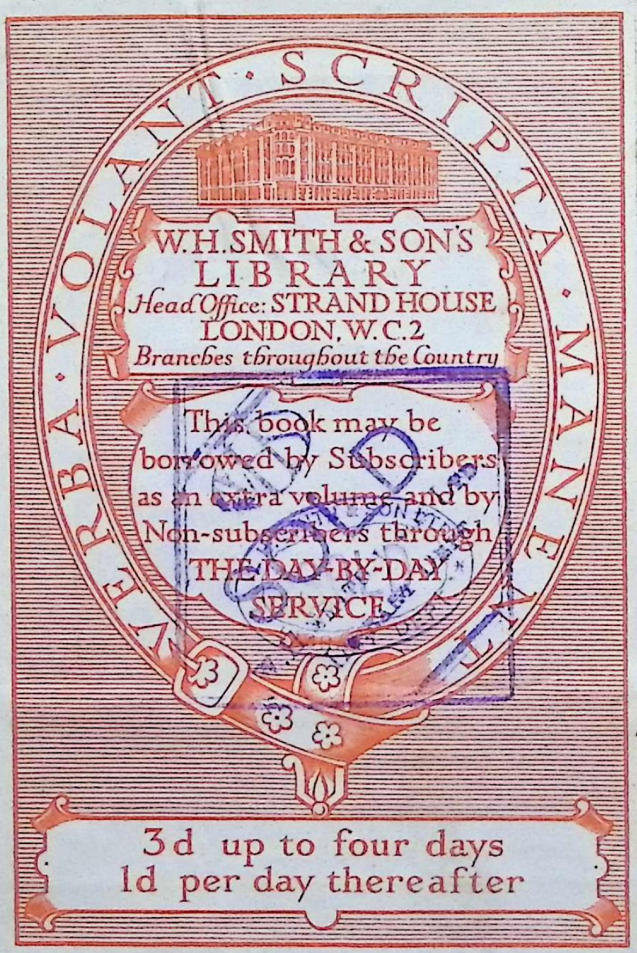

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YOU GO YOUR WAY

BY

KATHARINE BRUSH

CASSELL AND COMPANY LTD.
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THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN
COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH THE
AUTHORISED ECONOMY STANDARDS

To
ARTHUR AND DOROTHY PARTRIDGE

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CHAPTER ONE

THE divorce of Bill and Connie Crowell had been preceded by what they had described at first as a trial separation—this was Connie's phrase, even as it was her idea—and Bill had moved into the bachelor apartment he still occupied. Connie had found it for him, and she had fixed it up. These were the curtains she had ordered ; these were the colours she had personally helped the painter mix for walls and woodwork. Connie was clever about things like that. "I should have been a decorator," she said dreamily every now and then. "A decorator, or a torch singer, or something. Or a cigarette girl."

Connie was nothing except beautiful and amiable and idle, and every now and then it seemed to trouble her.

The apartment she had found for Bill was one in which—as she explained to him—he could lead the life of Riley, if he wanted to. "No liftman," she pointed out. "No hall-porter, nothing. The blondes can come and go at will, and nobody——"

"What blondes ? "

"You wait."

"And anyway," said Bill, "I like grey-eyed brunettes better."

"Darling," Connie said, "that's sweet of you. But that's sheer habit."

They were being very light and cheerful at that time, because they were so sad. This suddenly seemed such an appalling thing for them to be doing.

There were eight apartments in the house—eight doorbells and eight letter-boxes in the vestibule—and

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Bill's apartment was one-half of the fourth floor, which was the top floor. It consisted of five rooms, counting the bath and kitchenette as two. The others were a spacious living-room, a bedroom nearly the same size, and an unidentified small chamber off the living-room. "That could be a library," Connie said, "or are you leaving me the books? Or it could be a bar, or a kind of den, or you could put a ping-pong table in there. Or you could make a guest room out of it, only you don't want a guest room, do you? Fatal to have a guest room in New York. It'd better be a kind of den." So it was a kind of den.

All the rooms had twelve-foot ceilings, and big windows facing south and east; and there were open fireplaces in both the living-room and bedroom, and Connie said the flues were all right, too, because she'd tried them—she had made the agent burn some paper, on a windy day.

She had really been remarkably efficient. She was surprised and proud and pleased, and so was Bill. The place was definitely a find, and its advantages explained the rent and easily outweighed the fact that this was higher than he'd hoped it would be. It was higher than a kite, to tell the truth, but he assured himself that it would even itself up—he would save taxi fares, for one thing. Taxi fares were quite an item when you lived on Ninety-first Street, and only used your own car for occasional excursions, such as getting out to golf clubs and beaches in the summer, and going to football games at Princeton and New Haven in the fall.

Living as a bachelor in the Sixties, between Park and Lexington, he could walk almost everywhere he ever went, except to Wall Street. His uptown, or festive, orbit was a little central island within Manhattan Island,

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and a map of it might have been drawn with a few short elliptical strokes, innumerable polka dots, and some suburban arrows.

Essentially, its western boundaries were the theatres and Madison Square Gardens, its eastern ones were the apartments of acquaintances in Sutton Place, and to the south there were the Princeton Club, since this was not a business map. The northern extremity—not counting the Polo Grounds or the Yankee Stadium—would still be Ninety-first Street. Connie was still living there, and Pat. Pat was their daughter.

Bill had enthusiastic friends, and a great many of them, and one of the fond things they said was that there was nobody like old Bill. They were mistaken. They could hardly have been more mistaken than they were when they said that. In Wall Street alone, there were perhaps ten thousand young men like old Bill; and in Twenty-One, and at the Princeton Club, the Yale Club and the Harvard Club, at dinner parties, and at débuts, and in stalls at the new hit shows, and on the foyer between acts, and at El Morocco later, and on snow trains, and on football specials, and in swimming pools, and in cabanas, and at the airports and the piers, and in boxes at the hockey games on Sunday nights in winter, and annually always at the Beaux Arts ball—a little tight—there were still others.

This particular Bill Crowell was in his early thirties now, and he was five feet eleven inches tall. He had a pleasant blue-eyed face, clean-shaven, with a squareness to it; he had black eyebrows, a broad forehead, large snug ears, and good white teeth. His hair was dark and straight, and thick enough to last for some years more; he wore it parted on the left, and stuck securely. Asked to describe him, people found that

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there was nothing to lead off with. A nice face. Likeable. No, not good looking—well, yes, but not handsome——

He departed from his type in other ways, most of them minor ones. Perhaps the only major way was that he had a better disposition than most people—he was born good natured, genial, casual and easy-going. It was his cross, he sometimes thought ; events had proved it so. But then at other times he thought it had been just the opposite.

For the rest, he was a native of the nearer Middle West, and he still retained some traces of the accent and the idiom—he still said, "The cat wants in," and still used "any more" for "nowadays." He said he used to be with Bishop, Bryan & Company, at 40, Wall, but that any more he was with Conroy, Noyes, in the same building. He was affable about repeating this, upon demand.

He collected match boxes ; took Turkish baths for hangovers ; liked mystery stories, picture magazines, and the works of Hemingway, Gallico, Benchley and Runyon ; voted Republican ; dressed well ; spent lavishly, and over-tipped habitually, and never added up the bill, and never would ; smoked two and a half packets of cigarettes a day ; was bored and restless when alone ; recited robust verse when in his cups ; usually missed trains ; always lost hats, and often overcoats ; supported both his parents ; played good golf and better tennis ; imagined that he played good bridge ; feared no man but the dentist and the income-tax examiner ; and tried not to be in love with his ex-wife, but was.

So now you know.

The whole thing dated back to 1928, when they first met. To tell their story properly is to begin at the beginning. It was in the autumn—in October, as they

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both remembered. Bill was a fledgling broker then, so lately out of Princeton that he wore no garters, or had worn none till the firm got after him. Connie was Connie Gregory, aged eighteen. She wasn't exactly a débutante, not having exactly that kind of family, but she got about a lot.

She had a wealthy self-made father, with a factory in Jersey, and a house in the East Seventies, and a third wife by Molyneux. Connie lived with them most of the time, although she also had a mother and a stepfather in Boston whom she visited. She was, in fact, one of those contemporary children with so many parents that in the general confusion nobody had looked after her very well. She had brought herself up. There had been governesses and teachers, of course, but they hadn't really counted. Connie's own decisions had always been final with Connie, and her own word on things had always been law.

She was a product of one of those Miss Somebody's schools in Connecticut—though not a finished product in the strictest sense. She had not graduated, but departed, overcome by ennui. That had been during the rainy February of the year before. She was now studying tap dancing, "as much as anything." This she replied to Bill when he inquired, the night he met her. She added that she didn't know what she was doing, exactly. She never knew exactly, she said. Which was quite true.

She was as casual as Bill himself, and far more vague; and she delighted him inordinately, from the very first. He liked to listen to her—this was something new for him, whose girls had all been good to look at and never mind the rest. Connie was amusing, in addition. She wasn't witty—it wasn't that at all, or even like that. She was just a funny girl, in an endearing sort of way.

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Feminine, indefinite, absent-minded — unpredictable. Conversationally so, and so by nature.

Bill found out all about her, as quickly as he could. He laboured at it like a scientist, all that first evening. They were at a private party, given in a speakeasy, of all quaint places. That was how long ago it was. Their host had hired the whole establishment and all the personnel for the occasion. They would remember that fact, and the fact that they had seen each other first in the bar mirror, and the tune the orchestra was playing which was "Dance, Little Lady," and the moment of their introduction, when their hostess's voice kept saying that of course they'd met before, they must have met, don't be ridiculous. . . .

They were never really introduced, due to this incredulity. They just began to dance, after a while; and Connie said at once, "Who's that?"

"Who's who?"

"That woman."

She had a lazy little voice, below his ear.

"You mean the one who didn't introduce us?" Bill said. "That's Mrs. Burgess. Don't you know Mrs. Burgess? Sure you do. She's giving the party."

"I suppose so," Connie said. "She doesn't look very familiar, though. And, anyway, I thought it was that man."

"What man?"

"Some man somewhere about," said Connie. "With a bald head, quite tight. I thought he was giving the party."

"Well, he is," said Bill. "That's Mr. Burgess. Look, are you sure you were invited?"

"She calls him 'Lovey,'" Connie said. "I heard her. And he calls her 'Petty.' Well, but they're probably your aunt and uncle. I mean I'm always

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doing that. Never mind them, anyway," she added suddenly. "Talk to me, why don't you?"

All of which was just a sample.

It must have been two full minutes before anyone cut in on Bill, that first time—that was practically a long-term record, as he later learned—and even when it happened there was compensation in the fact that at a little distance the visibility was better. He retreated to the wall and followed Connie with his eyes. He still wore traces of a grin, and a bemused, almost punch-drunk expression. This last did not abate during the ensuing scrutiny. There was indeed no slightest reason why it should.

She wore a sleek black satin dress that loved her figure, and why not, and she had satin hair to match the dress, cut in a page's bob, and she had eyes the colour of green water on a grey day, and the most amazing eyelashes—almost like visors, only curving up—and a white face in which her mouth seemed redder than the reddest lipstick. She was all contrasts, even to the way her face was formed, the pointed chin making a triangle with the wide cheekbones, and the cheekbones in their own turn giving her eyes a funny shape for which Bill sought a suitably glamorous simile, but found only a graphic one. Shaped like canoe paddles, by golly. Fascinating.

The whole thing worried him; it was too much of a good thing entirely; and when he knew Connie a little better—about fifteen cut-ins better—he took it up with her, saying gloomily: "Maybe I'm crazy. I bet I am. Or else it's this damn candle-light. All I know is, you can't possibly be as beautiful as all that."

"Who can't?" said Connie, but she murmured it.

"What?"

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"Nothing. I'm just humming."

"Well, stop it," Bill said. "Pay attention. Here I am trying to work this thing out, and you hum. I say you can't possibly be that beautiful, for two obvious reasons—because in the first place, the thing's preposterous, on the face of it, and in the second place you're too much else besides. No girl has everything."

"Too true."

"No use expecting it."

"Not a bit of use."

"But a man can hope," Bill said. "He can even ask. So what do you look like in the daytime? That's what I want to know."

"It's my worst time," she said sadly. "I become a hag. What do you think?"

"I think I'm in love with you."

Connie merely nodded.

"What does it mean when you nod your head?" Bill demanded, not unnaturally. "Is that approval, or just plain conceit, or what is it?"

"It's a little of both," said Connie. "It means I always like that, so I think it would be nice if you were. You must let me know, when you decide definitely."

"Don't rush me, now," Bill said. "We Crowells never make snap decisions. We never fall in love except at lunch-time, in a good north light. So what are you doing at one o'clock to-morrow?"

"That depends."

"That's not the answer."

"But it is," said Connie. "What's to-morrow, Tuesday?"

"No," said Bill, "for heaven's sake, it's Friday. You're not even close. And, anyway, it makes no difference. If you've got a date you'll have to break

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it. You're lunching with me to-morrow at one at the Plaza—at a window table."

"Well, if it's fine," said Connie. "Of course, if it rains, you couldn't tell a thing."

It didn't rain. They had a window table, and they sat facing each other, and the sun came ninety-three million miles to shine on Connie like a spotlight—one of those becoming spotlights, faintly pink, a little bit diffused. They lunched for two and a half hours, though they ate almost nothing. Bill blinked his eyes from time to time, but without ever moving them. "Well, I'll be damned," he said at intervals; and, "Look at you!" he marvelled.

He never did get over it, from that day forward.

CHAPTER TWO

THEY were married the following May, which was the May of 1929. Even fledgling brokers could afford to marry then, if they were smart at all, and Bill was always pretty smart in business. Well, anyhow, in business. He wasn't very sure about the other ways, as he looked back.

They had planned to be married quietly, but Connie's family rallied and presented a united front in favour of a big church wedding, so they had a big church wedding, with six bridesmaids and eleven ushers—the twelfth had somehow cut his forehead open at the bachelor dinner —and with all Connie's father's wives and all their husbands in the long front pew.

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They went to Europe on their honeymoon. They had a month exactly, and they divided the time in the usual ratio—seventeen days in Paris to three in London, and the rest in transit.

Bill had been over once before, and Connie several times, but nothing had ever been so much fun apart as everything was together. It was even a little too much fun, they made a little too merry in Paris, they met too many friends, and sat about at too many tables per afternoon and per evening, and piled up too many of those saucers with the prices in francs on the rims, and stayed out too late at night, and covered too much territory, and ordered too many bottles of the wine you couldn't buy at home, and had too many headaches in the mornings, until after coffee. Coffee always fixed them up, and they felt marvellous again. That was how young they were in those days.

They spent all their money, of course, in no time, and had to keep cabling New York for more. Connie bought clothes ; you would have thought she hadn't a trousseau to her name ; and Bill bought a taxicab one night, in a whimsical moment—not to mention an authentic handle-bar moustache to wear while he was driving it—and there were fines to pay as a result of that, great angry Gallic fines, and it was all very high and wide and handsome and American-in-Paris.

They wouldn't have gone to London at all, except that Bill had some calls to make for the firm. They took the train and the Channel steamer—neither would let the other fly—and on the trip they talked a lot and grew serious-minded and bought a London guide-book and made a list of things to see in three days, and went on the sherry-and-Rhine-wine wagon.

It worked out fairly well, too, except that Paris caught

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up with them in London, and they slept twelve hours a night, which didn't leave much time for sightseeing, after all. It was queer in how many different ways Paris caught up with them in London—Bill suddenly began spouting Princeton French, for one thing, although in France his only phrases had been his pets, "*Eh voilà!*" and "*Zut alors!*"; and Connie suddenly gained four pounds, which she said was sheer *sole au vin blanc*.

She was distressed about it, and on the ship going home she starved herself until Bill became alarmed and forbade it in a loud, masterful voice. To his astonishment, this was effective; Connie looked meekly at him. Both of them were pleased with him for wearing the trousers in this family.

On the last night out before New York, they went up to the top deck and sat on a bench and gazed at the moon and decided that their marriage was a vast success. "This is really something, isn't it," as Connie put it; and she sighed deeply and said sorrowfully, "Oh, dear."

"Oh what?"

"Nothing. I just said, 'Oh, dear.'"

"I heard you," Bill said. "But I thought maybe it was the wind. Why would you say 'Oh, dear' on the end of a swell little speech like that?"

"I was just thinking."

"Thinking what?"

"Well, it worries me," Connie said. "Because I've always had a theory—and then when the time came I didn't live up to it. I mean I've always thought every woman ought to be married more than once, if she's attractive. She ought to marry the wrong man first—or even maybe two wrong men. *Then* she ought to meet the right one and marry him and be happy the rest of

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her life. But not till then. And look at me—married to the right one first, and happy already."

"Too damn bad. Ah, the pity of it! What shall we do, get a divorce?"

"Well, don't be huffy-chuffy about it," Connie said. "It *is* too bad, in a way. I mean, if it goes on being as grand as this, I'll never be miserable—and you have to be miserable some time, or how do you know how happy you are? If you see what I mean."

"My baby's gone batty," Bill said to the moon. "She's completely and hopelessly nuts. Listen to her, will you?"

"But you like me, though."

"Well—roughly—yes, I do."

"How much?" Connie asked with interest.

So they fell to discussing that, and forgot the theory. Bill even forgot it for years.

New York reared up out of a fog at nine o'clock the following morning, and a friend of Bill's was on the pier with cash to get them through the customs. They stayed at an hotel for their first couple of weeks, while Connie bought furniture—modern furniture—and fixed up their new apartment.

They had found the place and signed a lease before they went away. It was in Greenwich Village, in a tall new building, and they had chosen it because Connie had said, at a glance, that it looked like them. You could see what she meant. It was all living-room and no kitchen—though there was a serving pantry, of course—and the bedroom was on a balcony, with a little round staircase spiralling up. The whole thing couldn't have been more charming or less practical. "And but divine for parties!" Connie said. And but she proved quite right.

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They had a very festive and extravagant first year, in spite of the market crash in October, which Connie said they must just ignore. This was consummately easy for her, of course, and in point of fact it wasn't so difficult even for Bill as it later became, because, in the first place, he wasn't and never had been what you could call the worrying kind ; and in the second place, those were the days when everybody thought that everything was going to be all right again in a little while. Bill certainly thought so, and the fact that he had lost his shirt in the late calamity, though it did definitely irk him, occasioned him no great concern. The shirt had not been much of a shirt, and anyway he'd get it back, so what the hell.

This was his autumn-of-1929-and-spring-of-1930 philosophy, and Connie said ardently : "You don't know how I love you for not caring ! I mean, all the other men we know are being so *dismal* about the whole thing. Everybody else's man but mine," she said, and kissed him proudly.

He had his cues, in other words. He always had them.

So that was that year. Taken as a whole, it was a multiplication by twelve of the month of their honeymoon ; and nothing marred any part of it. They lived on roof gardens that first summer, and joined a Long Island beach club for the swimming, and were much in demand for country-house week-ends lasting from Thursday night until Monday, so that the weeks amounted to little and the heat was easy to bear. Their energy was boundless in those days, and their imaginations worked overtime, and they did silly things as fast as they thought of them, such as going yachting in yachting caps on a chartered tug called the *Ella F. McGlew*, and entering a dance marathon to see what it was like, and

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parentally adopting an entire jazz orchestra, and holding a picnic on the roof of a rented Fifth Avenue bus, and taking the night boat to Albany one night—arriving on board separately, and pretending to be strangers who picked each other up, and so to bed.

Then in the autumn there were the football games, and the new shows, and all the autumn things. They had a very good time, almost all the time, and the winter passed, and spring was around again, and suddenly one day they had been married a whole year. Well, no—it wasn't so sudden that they weren't prepared, and they gave each other all kinds of presents, wonderful ones and fearful ones, at the breakfast table that morning.

And they kept telephoning each other tenderly at intervals all day, and they lunched together at one o'clock, and met again at five for cocktails ; and that evening they were supposed to go to a party but they didn't go—they sent a telegram instead, and dined alone together at the speakeasy where they had met in the first place, and later they hired a carriage from the Plaza stand and drove through the park and got out at the lake and hired a rowboat, in which they rowed around for a long time, talking things over. Talking the whole year over.

And it had been such a good year that it bothered Connie, and she had a slight reversion to her shipboard mood of eleven months ago, if Bill had recognized it ; and this time she said : " It's been too good, that's the trouble. I like it too well, being married to you. I'm beginning to feel like a settled old matron, damn it." And so saying, she stood up suddenly in the rowboat, and climbed upon the seat, and dived gracefully overboard in her red chiffon evening dress.

She was an expert swimmer, so it was not to rescue her, but merely to join her, that Bill shipped his oars

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and also dived. Her head was bobbing near by when he came up. "The trouble is," she said, "there's no surf. Now you take Asbury Park."

Bill looked at her morosely, through his hair. "Some other time," he said. "I'm in no mood, at the moment. This was a bright idea, I must say. Well, here we are. Now what do we do?"

"Now we just bask," said Connie, floating on her back, "—like porpoises. Don't you like it here? Where else do you want to go? By the way, where's your pocket book?"

"In my pocket, I hope."

"Won't it get wet?"

"Why, no. Why should it?"

"I see," said Connie. "That's what I thought. Look, some day let's swim the English Channel."

"I've got a better idea," Bill said, "and it's for right now. Let's swim ashore and go home. This'll be about enough of this, you little dim-wit. You're going to catch your death of pneumonia as it is, I suppose you know. This is the damnedest coldest water I ever was in."

"You should have worn your topcoat," Connie said solicitously. "Of course you're cold, if you will go swimming with nothing on but a dinner jacket. Men have no sense about their health, I always say. Listen a minute!"

"You listen yourse——"

"I mean 'Listen' in the sense of 'Hark,'" said Connie. "Is that a rescue party, hallooing from the land?"

"Very likely."

"Or is it a cop?" said Connie hopefully. "A ferocious cop? Listen and see if he's asking us where we think we're going—to a fire?"

Eventually they swam in side by side, pushing the

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rowboat. They tethered it to a tree and left it there. They paid off the carriage driver with silver—he didn't seem to like the colour of their paper money, nor its texture either—and they rode rapidly home in a taxi, doing what Connie called sitting-down-getting-up exercises all the way. Brandy seemed indicated when they got to the apartment, so they repaired to the kitchen where they could drip on the linoleum. Bill filled two little glasses and Connie said enthusiastically: "It's really marvellous what a swim will do for you, isn't it? I feel refreshed and invigorated. I feel ready for another year, do you?"

Bill's teeth were chattering, but they chattered gallantly. "A hundred other years," they said.

He drank to it, and so did Connie, holding his hand hard.

CHAPTER THREE

THEY had a second year that was a good deal like the first, and then a third year that differed radically, because Connie was having a baby. Connie and her best friend, Janet Chisholm, were both having babies. It was a pact they had made one day over a luncheon table at Schrafft's. Connie and Bill's baby was to be a boy named Michael, but they were careful to call him Patricia all the time he was coming. This was Connie's idea—she had maintained from the first that the thing to do was to pretend they wanted it to be a girl, and then maybe it wouldn't be. Bill said he didn't really care which it was, but of course he did.

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He had the usual paternal thoughts. Crowell's Drop Kick Wins for Andover. Crowell's Touchdown Smashes Yale. Michael Crowell Becomes a Morgan Partner.

The wonder child was to arrive in January, 1933. They awaited him in a new apartment, into which they had moved in October—the Ninety-first Street apartment, half a block from Central Park. This was relatively as big as a barracks, and all on account of Michael—in fact it was simply incredible how much additional space you had to have for just one baby, who would presumably be quite small. Bill said: "Is he bringing his friends, or what is this?" There were even certain exterior requirements, such as a bit of a balcony off the living-room for Michael's sun baths, and the whole of Central Park round the corner for his airings. The rent was $3,500—£700 a year, as they would say in England—or $3,250 on a five-year lease. A bargain, said the agent. A Depression bargain, if you ever saw one.

Connie agreed wholeheartedly with him, and she snapped it up.

So here they were, in ten or eleven rooms instead of three. There was the nursery, and a room for the nurse adjoining, and a bath for each, and a kitchen—a real kitchen—and a dining-room, likewise real. And there were two servants' rooms, as there had to be, because now they would have to have a cook and a waitress-chambermaid—they could no longer do with the single-handed services of the Empress of Harlem, as they had before. The Empress of Harlem, who innocently supposed that her name was Lucy, had always been a better cocktail-mixer than she was anything else, anyway; although in all fairness it had to be admitted that her imitation of Ethel Waters singing "Am I Blue?" was pretty darn good.

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And, finally, there was a dressing-room for Connie, off their bedroom, and a corner for Bill to worry in down the hall—this was called his study, but as a verb the word was a euphemism. Worrying was what he did, not to say downright fretting and fuming. It still wasn't in character, of course, but it had to be done. He covered the backs of envelopes with little arithmetical calculations, all of which came out minus, with monotonous consistency. He didn't talk to Connie about it, though he knew he would have to sooner or later. After the baby came would be time enough—he hoped.

Connie decorated again, and she always enjoyed that. So many more rooms required a lot more furniture—and anyway, Connie said, she was tired of modern. "The pendulum swings back," she explained solemnly, so now it was period stuff. She shopped like mad, and when she had been out shopping you never knew what would come home—a dining-room table and twelve chairs, or a pair of thistle-down bootees for Michael; a two-ton couch or a bassinet; a mountain or a mouse.

It kept her busy and happy, up to the very last. She really made a gallant job of the whole project, from beginning to end, and it all seemed singularly brave of her, because, as she said herself, she was obviously not cut out for this type of thing. "Me in a maternity dress," she observed lugubriously from time to time.

But she complained very little, really, and she took the whole matter very seriously, and read all the right books and did all the right things—she even went to concerts, and brought operatic records home and played them on the gramophone, in the hope that Michael was listening. She drank nothing but a little wine, and she smoked only ten cigarettes a day, though she cut them carefully into thirds with scissors and used a holder for

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them, so that it made thirty smokes, while they lasted, and seemed less of a deprivation.

She had said all along that she supposed any baby of theirs would be born in some public place, such as a theatre lobby, or a night-club dressing-room ; and as a matter of fact it was only by luck and by quick work at the wheel on the part of a taxi-driver that Pat wasn't born in traffic on the way to the hospital. The whole thing was over almost before Bill had had time to start shaking with fright, but the reaction was terrible, and he shook for the next three days. Pat had lots of dark hair, and peeping blue eyes that you saw occasionally, and really quite a few eyelashes for one so very young. Both her parents forgave her for being a girl as soon as they saw her, and Connie maintained that the operatic records had done no good at all, because Pat cried in four-four time, like a saxophone.

She did, at that.

There were two weeks when Bill felt as though he were living in the hospital itself—half there, and half in taxicabs in traffic going to and fro—and then there was a sunshiny Saturday when he took his little family home. " Now we are four," he said to himself, because there was Pat's nurse, Miss Oliphant. She had belonged to the hospital, but she was going to be theirs. She was a sturdy girl with excessive teeth and a ready laugh and a way of saying, " Oh, Mr. Crowell, you're a riot ! " Parenthood had its drawbacks, Bill and Connie agreed.

Connie had never been so gay as she was when she got home from the hospital, and she had never looked so beautiful. She wanted parties, people, clothes—oceans of clothes, she said rapturously—and all the things she had done without for so long. Bill didn't blame her at all, and nobody knew how he hated to tell her she

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couldn't have them ; he kept putting it off and putting it off ; but when he finally did tell her, he found that he needn't have dreaded it so much. Connie was going to have what she wanted, anyway.

She was sweet about it—she really couldn't have been sweeter—but she just wouldn't listen, that was the thing. You just couldn't talk economy to her. Bill found that out, quite definitely, and for once and for all, during that next month. Well, you could talk, of course, and in a way Connie did listen, but it came to the same thing, because you didn't get anywhere. She simply said : " Well, but we can use my money "—and it was true that she had a lot of it to use. Her various parents kept vying with each other to keep her supplied.

" But that's yours," Bill argued patiently. It wasn't a new argument. " Look, now," he said. " We've settled that one a hundred times. Let's not start it all over again."

" Why are men so funny when it comes to their wives' money ? " Connie said, and added, " Poem ! " in glad surprise.

" An epic poem, in fact."

" I like it, too," said Connie. " It scans and everything. I think I made it up—but maybe I just read it somewhere. Well. Anyway. Why are they ? Men, I mean."

" The explanation is long and involved," Bill said. " I'll have to go into it with you some other time. Let's stick to the subject, here, shall we ? Just this once ? The point at the moment is that the Crowells are in debt up to their necks—and, as I was saying, that means——"

" Means we'll use mine," said Connie, as before. " Why on earth not ? It's too silly, when we need it. What's it for. There it just sits, in banks and things,

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doing nothing." And even thinking of it sitting there in banks and things, doing nothing, excited her imagination and brightened her whole face, and she said: "Oh, darling—let's take a little of it out, right now, and go to Europe, or Bermuda, or somewhere. Or Honolulu. Just you and me, to celebrate Pat. We haven't been anywhere on a trip since I can remember, except to the obstetrician's. . . ."

There wasn't anything you could do. He made up his mind to that, eventually. He just had to work it out for himself, and not bother her with it. On his reduced commissions and his twice-cut salary, he had to cope with these new expenses somehow; he had to get blood out of this turnip of a market. And he did, too, in the long run; but it all took time—a couple of years of time. And in the meanwhile, everything else went wrong, and everything else happened.

CHAPTER FOUR

BECAUSE he got grim. That was the first sign—that was how the trouble started. In retrospect, when it was much too late, he could see this only too clearly. He grew up, during those next years, and he even grew old in his spirit, and the thing was that Gloria didn't age by so much as a minute in the meantime. "Methuselah with a child wife," Bill called himself once, and he felt that way, often. Even at his youngest, he felt paternal, or avuncular.

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Almost anybody would have. Those were two of Connie's very youngest years, as a matter of fact. One of them, the first one, was the year she cut her hair off short and wore it in a fluff of ringlets all over her head, and opened her eyes very wide to go with this naïve coiffure, and chose the kind of clothes that suited it. She was always changing her appearance anyway, and this was the newest phase. She explained to Bill that it was supposed to be *gamine*—or at least kind of—and also that it was supposed to keep her from feeling too motherly, which would be boring.

"I mean, as a type," she supplemented. "I like being a mother, but I would loathe being the motherly type. So I had to do something."

"There was grave danger, was there?"

"Yes," said Connie.

So she wore the fluff of ringlets, and the wide grey eyes, and looked like Pat. It really was absurd how much she looked like Pat. "Only this one's got her teeth," Bill said, when people spoke about it. "And she can talk. That's how I tell which babe is which at my house."

He and Miss Oliphant functioned efficiently, they both took care of both their charges, and sometimes it was turn-and-turn about with them—there were evenings when Bill found himself in the nursery, putting Pat to bed, while Miss Oliphant in the dressing-room dressed Connie for a party. That was what it came to presently—although not just at first. For a while Bill went to all the parties, too, just as he always had; and when he got there he tried hard to be as genial as he used to be; but it was no use nowadays. It simply didn't work. Even his drinks only seemed to make him quieter and gloomier—and even staying awake became a problem, after twelve o'clock.

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In short, he was terrible. Everybody told him so, and nobody knew it better than he did himself, and all he said when good friends chided him was, "Aren't you right!" In his own mind he magnified it, and in his own phraseology he was the world's worst drizzlepuss —he was the heavy muffin all the time. And although he couldn't seem to help it, he could at least avoid inflicting himself on the partying public, as long as this mood lasted. And so it was that he took to saying to Connie, "You go without me." And so Connie began going without him, in her merry little clothes.

Then it was amazing how many beaux and boy-friends and escorts simply sprang—sprang was the word—into the breach, and into action. It was as if they had been lying in wait for this, all these four years. Connie was rushed exactly as she used to be before she was married, and it pleased her very much, and even dazzled her quite a little. Bill took it as her due, and he kept calm, and felt benign. Orchids came in glossy boxes, and you could hardly move in the living-room without falling over the long legs of some infatuated college boy, and the telephone rang ceaselessly, and when Bill answered it, masculine voices said, "Oh, hello, Bill, is Connie there?" or, "Let me speak to your beautiful wife"; or, more timidly, "Er—Mr. Crowell? Er—this is Rollo Ryan. From New Haven. You probably wouldn't remember me, but I met you the other night. Er—could I please speak to Mrs. Crowell for just a minute?"

One of them even wanted Connie to go to Yale for a prom, and it amused Bill and amused her, and she went, assuring him when she returned that she had had a *succès fou*, and that everybody had wanted to know where she went to school, and that she had said Vassar, but they hadn't believed her.

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"I don't see why not," Bill said indignantly.

"Oh, not what you think. They didn't believe I was old enough to have been in college. So after that I just said Farmington."

"And that was more like it."

"Yes," said Connie. "That was fine. . . . In fact, several of them are driving over there to see me," she added pensively, "next Sunday afternoon."

"They're not! You little wretch, of all the——"

"I couldn't help it," Connie said, with dignity. "I didn't invite them. They all just invited themselves, and what could I say?"

That was the sort of thing, and it was cumulative, of course—wherever she went she made fresh conquests, and the total jumped like a taximeter. New names kept coming in to Bill over the phone all through that winter; and Connie was out every evening now, so that he saw very little of her. There had been a time when she used to struggle up from sleep in the mornings to have breakfast with him, but now her nights were too late for that, and she slept right through. In the afternoons when he came home she was usually out somewhere again, or there would be hats and coats on the hall chairs and a convocation of swains in the living-room. This wouldn't break up until it was time—or even past time—for her to dress for the evening. Often her dinner escorts met the day boys straggling out.

"Look, I'm terrific," Connie said to Bill, as this continued unremittingly. "Don't you really think I am? I've seldom seen anything like me, have you? I wouldn't have dreamed it could happen, at my age—and me married, and a mother, and everything. Aren't you proud of me for being so popular? You ought to be."

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"Of course I am," Bill said truthfully. "You bet I am. After all—whose girl are you?"

"Let me think," said Connie. "I'm not very good at remembering names, but I never forget a face. He's got blue eyes and big ears and a square chin and I love him. Oh, I know—Crowell, it is. W. S. Crowell, Junior's, I am."

"So why wouldn't Crowell be proud? He's practically insufferable."

"And you don't mind a bit?" said Connie. "You're not even jealous or anything?"

She sounded a bit wistful; but when Bill said, "Why, no. Should I be jealous?" she looked at him incredulously, as though the suggestion had been his.

"Of whom?" she demanded. "Of those little pip-squeaks? *You?*"

"So that's what they are, is it," Bill said comfortably. "Somehow I'm glad to hear that. I thought they were getting bigger and better by the minute, myself. Who's that vast half-back, by the way?"

"Which one?"

"Or tackle," Bill said, on second thought. "Probably a Minnesota tackle. Big as all outdoors, at any rate. He calls me 'Sir,' very politely, and crashes to his feet when I come in the room. Who does he think I am—an old retired Supreme Court Judge or something? He must be damn near my age—football or no football."

"That's Blake Wagner. Blond, you mean?"

"As lemonade. And not quite bright, if you ask me. Last time he called me 'Sir' I called him 'Pop,' and he just said, 'What?' The guy can't even take a hint, can you imagine it? And as for all this jumping up all the time," Bill continued plaintively, "it's got to stop, that's all there is to that. Couldn't you teach him

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to be a little less respectful of my twenty-six years? I mean to say, imagine how I feel."

"I could try," said Connie. "There must be something we can do. Could we put a strap on his chair, do you think—and flash him a sign saying, 'Please Fasten Your Seat Belt'?"

"It's an idea."

Connie was enjoying herself. "Darling, go on," she said. "Tell me some more. Who else don't you like?"

Bill appeared to ponder, though he didn't have to. Not for a minute. Not for a second, even.

"There's that black-and-white job," he said presently. "Who might he be?"

"Could you describe him a little more fully?"

"New in our lives," Bill said. "And Continental as all hell. Kisses your hand—I mean yours," he stipulated with a nod at Connie. "Personally, I've been spared so far, but I wouldn't be too sure. Well, and hair like a Greek shoe shine. And a moustache—of sorts. All right, break down, now, baby. Stop pretending you don't know who I mean."

"I will if you'll stop pretending you don't know what his name is."

They both grinned cheerfully, and Bill said: "I can't pronounce it, that's my trouble. What nationality is he, anyway? Pig-Latin, maybe? Or Pomeranian? Or just plain gigolo?"

"Darling," Connie cried delightedly, "why, you *are* jealous! Why, but this is wonderful! I never in the world exp——"

"Who, me?" Bill was bellowing. "I'm what? Of that? You're crazy!"

"You sounded like it."

"Well, I'm not. I should sa-a-ay not!"

"And I should hope not either," Connie said, albeit

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somewhat disappointedly. "At least—not of him. He really is pretty awful, isn't he? I agree with you."

So that was that. Nothing at all. Everything quite okay.

It was just that you felt you had to check up and make sure, every once in a while.

And as for himself, he spent those widowed evenings at the desk in his study, or behind the market page of the evening paper. He kept elaborate accounts, and drafted impossible budgets, and figured endlessly, and swore, and muttered. He was always emptying ashtrays, because he filled them up so fast. He was always starting fires in waste-paper baskets, in his preoccupation. Sometimes he knocked off work and tried to read a mystery story, or he went downstairs and tramped round the block a couple of times. He would drink a solitary highball at about eleven and go to bed—invariably thinking: "The hell with this! This is no life. Snap out of it, why can't you?"

He usually woke when Connie came in—she usually woke him. Sometimes she was gay and stimulated by the party, or the dancing, or whatever it had been, and wanted to talk while she undressed. At other times it seemed that it was really very early, only about twelve-thirty or one, and that young Fittsy or Bitsy or Rollo or Doggo (they all had the damnedest nicknames) had stepped in for a nightcap before proceeding to his alleged home.

"Come on out and talk to us," Connie would say, and Bill would get up and put on a dressing-gown and go out and act as bartender and listener in the living-room. It didn't make any sense really, because he was always too sleepy to talk. He just sat there blinking benevolently at the prattling young folk.

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Once he found himself being dragged across the living-room floor like a drunk, and he shouted wildly, "Hey, what's all this? Who're you? What the hell do you think you're doing?" and Connie said, "Why, darling, hush. It's only Bake. Didn't you remember he was here?"—and sure enough it was that great polite ox pulling him along, and saying, "Yes, sir, it's me. You fell asleep, sir. In your chair."

"And where are we bound now, may I ask?"

"I was just going to put you back to bed. We thought you'd be more comfortable there."

That was the night he jumped grimly into his evening clothes at half-past one in the morning and took the pair of them out and whirled them round the town until half-past six. That was just to show them what was what.

It was late spring, by that time, and when summer came Bill and Connie had their first long separation—three whole months, broken only by occasional week-end reunions. Bill didn't allow himself any real vacation that year. Connie and Pat (with the Oliphant) went visiting all Connie's fathers and mothers, at their several summer bivouacs beside the sea or in the mountains. She kept writing Bill that she missed him horribly, but it couldn't have been too bad, because the letters were all full of names and doings. She illustrated them profusely with thumbnail sketches, and with the latest snapshots of Pat, who now had a tooth and looked divine. In some of the snapshots Connie herself appeared, and there were unknown young men in the background, or there were traces of them—a pair of legs here, or an elbow there, or a shadow fallen before the camera.

"Well, who'd you meet?" Bill said, when she got back in September. "Who were all those flying feet and hands? Let's have a full account."

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"But I wrote you all about them. There's nothing more to tell. What I want to know is," Connie said, "did *you* tell *me* everything? What were you up to yourself, all that time? I never did trust summer bachelors. Didn't you meet anybody pretty, or do anything amusing?"

"I did not."

"That's good," said Connie. "I'd scratch her eyes out. I got to thinking about that while I was away. I thought, 'What if he meets somebody he likes?', and it made me simply furious—and it worried me, too, because I thought, 'How would I know if he did? Would he tell me or wouldn't he?'"

"Of course I'd tell you."

"Is that a promise?"

"It is if it's reciprocal," Bill said, trying to speak lightly. "It's got to work both ways. As a matter of fact I'm glad you brought this up, the more I think about it. I mean to say, it's far more apt to happen to you than it is to me."

"I don't see why."

"Law of averages, if nothing else. You get about more."

He thought, "And, besides, I'm more in love with you than you are with me. There's always got to be one who is—and I'm the one." He knew it was true. It was a matter of difference in temperament, merely that, but still it was true.

"Well, then, let's promise each other," Connie was saying earnestly, "I'm certainly willing. If I ever meet anybody I really like at all—or who really appeals to me in the least—I'll tell you. I'll tell you the first minute. And you'll tell me, if you do. That's it, isn't it?"

"That's it."

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CHAPTER FIVE

THEY really took that vow just in the nick of time, as it turned out—or rather Connie did. She met somebody that same autumn. In fact, the promise wasn't more than a month old, or six weeks at the most, when she rang Bill up one night at midnight from a party and said, "Look. I'm at the Andersons'. Why don't you come over?"

"What for? I'm in bed. I'm sound asleep."

"Well, you'd better wake up and come over," Connie said. "There's a pretty terrific man here."

So Bill woke right up and went over, and there was indeed a pretty terrific man there—or a terrifically pretty man, depending on how you looked at it. Bill loathed him at sight. He had one of those beautiful spoiled-baby faces women seemed to like, and he had curly hair, and bold blue eyes, and a cleft in his chin, and all the rest of it. He looked like a male model from an agency, but he wasn't. Instead he was a rich man's son from a polo field on Long Island. He was mixing a drink when Bill first saw him—a big two-fisted drink for himself, as though he had two fists—and Connie and Bill stood together and watched him from across the room, and she said, with a little more doubt in her voice than had been in it on the phone, "Well, there he is. What do you think?"

"There he is, all right," Bill said. "Of that there is no question. What do you think yourself—before I start saying the wrong things?"

"Are you going to say the wrong things?" Connie said. "You haven't even met him yet. Maybe he's just as nice as he is good-looking—how do you know?"

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"I don't," Bill said. "I'm only guessing. What's his name? Where did he come from? Why isn't he in the movies? What's the matter with all the sex-appeal scouts from Hollywood—are they blind?"

"His name is Kenneth Cheever," she said severely, "and his father is Somebody Cheever, very important and capitalistic. That's all I know—except that you're taking the wrong attitude about him. It isn't like you to jump to conclusions. Can he help it if he's gorgeous?"

"He could try. He isn't even trying."

"Sh-h," Connie said. "Don't argue. Here he comes now."

Here he came now, bearing the dark strong highball in one hand, and a pallid one for Connie in the other. She reached out for hers, and said, "This is my husband, Bill Crowell. Ken Cheever."

They shook hands, and Cheever said, "How are you?" with a marked lack of concern.

I feel lousy, thanks, Bill said. But to himself.

The thing got hard to bear. He knew it would, from that first minute; and it did. The guy kept on looking the way he looked, there was no change at all—nor did you get used to looks like his. Every time you saw him you thought, "Hey, wait, is this true?" And they saw him very often, at the Bill Crowell's apartment. He was there like the furniture, all through that autumn.

He even turned the other rascals out, to some extent—or perhaps it was merely that he sat them out, and lingered after they had left. Anyway, there had been a safety-in-numbers atmosphere about the house that was gone now, and the numbers themselves were gone when Bill arrived from the office, and usually there were only Connie and Cheever to welcome him home. Sometimes they had Pat with them, and then they looked

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like a cosy family group. It seemed highly unlikely that Cheever cared much for babies—even this peerless one—but he put up a good bluff, at any rate.

"This is your Uncle Ken," Connie kept instructing her daughter. "You know him. He brought you that wonderful doll—bigger than you. Could you say thank you, do you think?" Pat could not, but she blew bubbles, and gazed enchantingly at Cheever, until her watching father thought reproachfully, "*Et tu, Brute.*" Women were all the same—even a woman ten months old. They all gazed that way at a guy like that one.

And then there were the evenings. Judging by the way the phone rang, Connie's invitations were still plentiful and varied—but this was more than could be said of her acceptances, generally speaking. She spent more evenings at home, for one thing, and that would have been fine, except that Cheever always came to call—or else he didn't even go. More times than not, he just stayed on, from afternoon straight through till closing-time. You never saw anything like it in your life.

When it first began, Bill said to Connie, "We seem to have taken a boarder. Is it that he likes home cooking? Where did he live before he lived with us? Who invites him here every damn day—and so on, far into the night? Do you?" But Connie said she didn't, and Bill was obliged to believe her. She said, "Ken is the kind that doesn't have to be invited," and it was too true.

"You could be out," Bill said. "Have you got to be here every afternoon when he barges in? Is there a law or something?"

"Why, Bill!" said Connie in an aggrieved voice. "This is my home, I thought. What do you want me to do in the afternoons—just roam the streets at large?

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And besides," she added logically, " I've usually just had lunch with him. So how could I be out when he barges in ? He barges in with me ? "

" I see. I didn't know about the lunches."

" Why, yes, you did, darling. I've told you every time."

" Nevertheless, I didn't realize they'd become a daily affair."

" Well, they haven't really, quite. They're only about every-other-daily."

" One would almost think you liked this fellow," Bill said carefully.

" Of course I like him," Connie said. " I like him better and better. He's so attractive, and he's gay and fun—he's even almost as much fun as you used to be, before you got so upset about business. He really is, and he's the first person I've met who even came close. So why shouldn't I like him ? And, besides, he's mad about me, and that's rather pleasant."

" I suppose it is."

" For a neglected wife, of course it is."

" A what ? "

" A neglected wife."

" *Listen !* " Bill began explosively—but that was as far as he got with that. The doorbell rang again just then, and the voice of Cheever was heard in the foyer, and Connie said, " Hush ! " because Bill was groaning, " Oh, my God ! Can't a man even finish a sentence ? In his own house ? "

Cheever's entrance was typical. You would have thought it wasn't Bill's own house, but his. Their housemaid worshipped him—he was to her a sort of Gary-Cooper-come-alive—and now his voice in the foyer threw her a kind word, to treasure always, while she flutteringly relieved him of his coat and hat and scarf

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and stick. Then he appeared, darkening the doorway of the living-room, seeming to fill it tightly with the wingspread of his shoulders. He wore white tie and tails, and he was a man who was made to wear them, and they were a costume designed especially for such a man to wear. Merely to see him was to wonder who his tailor was—you always did, you couldn't help it, it was just one of those wistful things.

Husbands were nothing to this splendid creature, with the splendid arrogance. He greeted Bill now as he entered, calling him "Crowell, old boy," but his acknowledgment of Bill's existence was like the kind word to the housemaid; and, moreover, it would probably be his last until he left. Bill had been through this times enough to know.

To Connie, Cheever said that he was sorry to be a little late. His tone suggested that she must have suffered agonies of waiting. He perceived at once that her white evening lace dress was new—Bill hadn't noticed it, of course—and he said, "You look angelic. Turn round, let's see the back," and she turned round for him, and then he said, "Yes, that's a dress. Oh, definitely yes!" That was the year when everybody had just discovered the word "definitely," and it was his favourite word, and Bill has never really cared much for it from that year to this.

It seemed that they were going out dancing somewhere. Dinner dancing. They couldn't decide where, and Connie finally said, "Well, anyway, let's have a cocktail here with Bill, before we go." So they all had cocktails, mixed by Cheever, who had picked up a new recipe. He introduced this fact by saying, "I don't suppose you've got any Bacardi, have you, Bill?"—which was somewhat infuriating. "Certainly I have," said Bill, who had one quart, by the happiest chance.

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He produced it, and opened it, and Cheever eyed the label and sniffed the stuff itself, and said, " It seems all right. Where'd you get this ? "

The repeal of prohibition, although imminent that autumn, was still a month away ; and so the question was legitimate. Bill took it ill, however, and he retorted coldly, " I made it out of some old mucilage and sarsaparilla—with a dash of bichloride of mercury, and just a *soupçon* of French dressing. What did you think ? You didn't think I bought it ? "

He wasn't often rude, and it surprised all three of them. " Why, Bill ! " said Connie. " Ken was only asking. What's the matter with you to-night ? "

" I'm sorry."

" You're tired," she said firmly. " That's what comes of overworking, night and day. That's what I was just telling him," she informed Cheever. " He works far too much, and too hard."

Bill said, " I don't seem to remember that that was what you were just telling me."

" In effect it was," said Connie. " It comes to the same thing."

They exchanged a level glance—a rather long one. Cheever in the meanwhile was busy measuring out the Bacardi. " I agree," he observed conversationally, in the little pause. " I never saw such devotion to business. It's a mistake, if you ask me. 'All work and no play——' Well, I mean, you have to relax sometimes."

" I'm familiar with the quotation," Bill said drily. " You needn't *ad lib*."

" For instance," said Cheever, ignoring that, " what were you planning to do this evening—work again ? Well, why not drop it and come out with us ? "

" Yes, why not ? " Connie echoed quickly.

" Do you a lot of good," said Cheever, who certainly

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seemed uncommonly friendly to-night. "I'll get a girl for you, if you like, and we'll make it a foursome."

This was a little too much. Bill had to correct him, and he did. "Thanks," he said. "But I think maybe I'm going to take my own girl. Why don't you get one for yourself?"

"That's what I meant, of course."

It wasn't, though.

The trouble with trying to be civilized about these things, Bill decided finally, was that all of a sudden you were so civilized you felt like a sap; the dividing line was the merest hairline, and suddenly it was crossed—suddenly something cracked in the back of your mind. And so it was that one December Sunday afternoon, for no more reason (but also for no less) than he had had on any other day that autumn, Bill said to Connie, "Look here, now. This has got to stop. Enough is plenty, and I've had it, and I'm not having any more of it."

"What do you mean? Any more of what?"

"Of Pretty Pants Cheever," Bill said heatedly. "I'm fed to the teeth with having him around. It's time you made up your mind what you're going to do about him, one way or the other."

Connie looked fascinated. "What do you mean—what I'm going to 'do' about him? I don't have to do anything, do I?"

"You certainly do," Bill said. "You certainly do if you're going to live with me. You're going to eliminate him from this picture—or else. I tell you I've had just about all of him I'm going to take."

"'Or else' what?" Connie said breathlessly.

Bill hadn't worked that point out; but when he was as angry as this he knew that all he had to do was open

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his mouth, and a suitable bellow of something or other would come. He opened it now, and it said, "What do you think? Did you expect me to stand him for ever? Well, I won't—and that's flat. I mean to say, either he goes or I go."

"Go where?"

"What?"

"Where would you go?"

Bill glared at her speechlessly. It was not merely that she wasn't giving the right answers—she wasn't even wearing the right expression, he discovered now. In fact it was obvious that she was simply delighted with this conversation, that she was revelling in it, and that she would prolong it for as long as he would let her. "All right," he thought, "my little pixie, I'll fix *you*." And aloud he said in a voice grown suddenly ominously quiet, "You think I can't answer that one, don't you? You think I don't mean it. Well, I do. Either Cheever goes, or I move out of here and down to the club."

"The Princeton Club?"

Bill thundered a mighty oath at that, and shouted, "Does it matter *what* club?"

"Of course it does," said Connie practically. "I'd want you to be comfortable."

The incredible thing about it all was that, in the end, Bill actually did move down to the Princeton Club, where he took a room, and sat in it in a state of complete stupefaction. For the life of him he couldn't understand how this had come about. Here he was. It was now five p.m. Three hours ago he had begun being firm with Connie about Cheever—and now it was five p.m., and here he was in this monastic cell. That was his homeless suit-case on the bed. "I've left my wife," he thought experimentally, but this was nonsense;

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and when he tried it in reverse, it still didn't state the case at all. Another phrase occurred to him, but his mind fended that one off nimbly. It was, "She called my bluff——" and it was inadmissible as yet.

Sitting sunk in the lone arm-chair in the unfamiliar room, still with his hat on his head—though pushed to the rear to let his brow cool off—he reviewed the afternoon's events as best he could, from start to finish. A more exasperating afternoon a man had surely never had. Connie's wicked glee was not abated, and she had gone right on talking all round the point at issue, until even Bill himself had had a hard time hanging on to it. He realized now that they had scarcely mentioned Cheever, except just at first.

"I can't think what's got into you," Connie had said silkily. "Making these mad threats to leave me. You wouldn't leave me, and you know it. Think how you'd miss me. It's ridiculous."

"I simply said if Cheev——"

"And poor little Pat," she reminded him. "You wouldn't leave Pat without a father? And, anyway, I don't see what's so wonderful about the Princeton Club. You'd have more freedom in a hotel, wouldn't you? No house rules."

"Go ahead. You're very funny. The whole thing's a great joke, isn't it!"

"No, really, it worries me," she said. "I don't think you've thought it out clearly enough. They undoubtedly have house rules at the Princeton Club, and you'd hate that. I mean, for instance—supposing you wanted me to come down there for over a week-end, and they have a Mann Act?"

That was the kind of thing, and after ten or fifteen minutes of it, Bill perceived that there was no use talking

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—no use yelling his head off, even. The time had come for action, and without another word he took the only course he could think of—he picked Connie up out of her chair and lugged her swiftly down the hall and locked her into a bathroom, to reflect upon her sins. He even removed the key from the lock, rattling it ostentatiously as he did so. "All right, but don't lose it," Connie's calm voice called from within.

Snorting, he strode away, making his footsteps pound and echo. He returned to the living-room, sat down, stood up again, and stalked the floor. "What she needs is a good beating," he remarked aloud. He paced some more; came face to face with a couple of dozen roses—Cheever's daily couple of dozen—grinning at him from the mantelpiece, and he yanked them out of their vase and crammed them into a waste-paper basket, heads down. "And that's another thing!" he said, as though Connie were still present. "I'm sick of his damn flowers. Place looks like a gangster's funeral." He glowered about him, and went after some orchids he saw floating in a bowl on the piano. He scooped those up, a dripping handful, and hurled them out of the window, and immediately heard a faint glad feminine cry from the sidewalk far below. "You're welcome, Toots," he muttered absently.

He felt a little better when these things were done, but not much better; and a tiptoed trip to the bathroom door to listen did not greatly help. He didn't know quite what he had expected to hear—but the rushing of mighty waters into the tub was distinctly not it. "My God, she's taking a bath!" he thought wildly, and somehow this seemed the crowning impudence, and he strode away again, and clapped on his hat, and punched himself into his overcoat, and departed from the apartment.

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He was for away an hour and nineteen minutes by his watch. There was nobody in the apartment but Connie, and there wouldn't be anybody there until six o'clock—it was Sunday, and the cook and housemaid were both out, and Miss Oliphant had taken Pat to her nephew's in Jersey to see Santa Claus. Bill walked down Madison Avenue without any special destination, and then after a while he turned east for a couple of blocks and put into a bar, because that seemed the appropriate place for a man who had just locked his wife in a bathroom —and who, furthermore, had just heard her making the best of it, and of him.

In the bar he had several useful Scotches, the first two or three of which increased his righteous indignation and appreciably strengthened his martial spirit. He would show her. He would fight it out on these lines if it took all winter. . . . Fiercely he ordered a fourth Scotch, but that one mellowed him, quite suddenly; and he began looking at his watch and thinking, "Time I let her out, I guess." He also thought, "Suppose there was a fire?" On the wings of this idea, he paid his bill in haste and took a taxi home and sped upstairs. The apartment looked as he had left it, but he could hear nothing from the bathroom now—no sound—well, yes, he could, at that, when he got near enough. He stopped in his tracks to identify it. It was a kind of happy humming, and it was accompanied by the buzz of his own pet electric razor.

"Hey, drop that!" he howled through the panel. "What are you doing with that?"

"I'm just shaving some fuzz off the shower curtain," said Connie, and she was.

When the door was unlocked and flung open, steam came out, and the mingled fragrance of soap and bath powder and bath salts, and finally the prisoner herself.

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Her skin was warmly pink, and she was clad in a brief, becoming costume made of face towels, one worn like a shawl, the other like a sarong. "It's high time you remembered about me," she remarked as she appeared. "I've just about exhausted the resources of this place, and I'm bored. But look at me! I've never been so clean in my whole life."

She seemed well satisfied. She really was a maddening little girl. "Well, how about you?" she added. "What's the news with you? I hope you've repented."

"'Relented,' did you say?"

"Of course I didn't. I said 'repented.' Because if you have," she continued graciously, "and if you're really sorry about everything, then I've decided to forgive you. We just won't say any more about it, shall we? We'll just forget it."

So it began again, of course. He couldn't let her get away with that. He was afraid he knew how it would end, this second time—and how it did end—but, even so, you couldn't let your woman get away with murder.

CHAPTER SIX

THE newest inmate of the Princeton Club, deep in such memories as these, was startled out of them presently by the ringing of his room telephone. It hadn't been very long. In fact it hadn't been more than half an hour since he saw her last. "Ha!" he crowed aloud triumphantly, and dived for the receiver,

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and then decided to let her ring a few times. So he did that.

Then he said "Hello?" in a careless voice.

"Hello, it's me," said Connie. "The Black Widow, or something. Look, do you know what? You forgot to pack any pyjamas or any tooth paste, or even your dressing-gown, or your dinner-jacket, or anything. I'm afraid you're not going to be very well groomed, for your new life. What else did you forget, do you know?"

"I haven't taken inventory yet."

"Well, you'd better take it," she said. "You may find you have to go out in a barrel. I knew no good would come of hurling things into that suit-case, in that abandoned way. You should have let me pack for you."

"So you kept saying."

"Yes, I was sweet about it," Connie said, "under the circumstances. Well—and apart from that—how's everything? How are you liking living alone?"

"It's okay for the moment. It may pall. How are you liking it yourself?"

"Oh, it's lovely here. So nice and peaceful. Only I was wondering about dinner."

"What about it?"

"Well, now that we've left each other, I just thought it might be intriguing if we had a dinner date together—in some neutral spot, I mean. Don't you think it would? Or don't you? Or have you already made one with somebody else?" she added on a note of anxiety.

"Why, no, I haven't," Bill said. "You're just in time, as a matter of fact. I was just sitting here considering offers. The only thing is, what's happened to Cheever? I thought you were dining with him as usual."

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"I knew you'd say that," Connie sighed. "Do you have to keep bringing him up all the time? I could break my date with him, couldn't I?"

"I don't know. Could you? You haven't had much practice."

He rang off feeling elated. Round One had certainly been hers, but he had a hunch Round Two was going to be his.

They were to meet at seven-thirty in their favourite hotel lobby, and Bill set out for this rendezvous with a quickened sense of new romance, which he supposed was just what Connie meant. It was a courting mood, and a gay mood, and it lasted until he arrived in the lobby and found her there ahead of him—but not alone, if you could imagine it. Not even alone on a night like this. She was in fact complete with Cheever, and Bill thought, "*Now* what the hell!" and for a moment he considered turning on his heel and sailing out again—pausing only long enough to let her see him come, and see him go.

He would have done it, too; but she evidently guessed his intent, because at sight of him she called out hurriedly across some forty feet of lobby space, "Hello, we're over here; Ken is just leaving!"

So Bill approached them, trying to saunter nonchalantly. They were both regarding him in a fixed way, and this was embarrassing and discouraging—suddenly his suit felt out of press, although he knew it wasn't, and his tie awry, and his trousers baggy at the knees, and his face unshaven. The whole thing was Cheever's fault, of course, as it so often was. His watching eyes had that "Who-is-this-tramp?" expression.

He rose at the last minute, towering over Bill as

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usual ; saying, " Crowell, old boy, hello," and shaking hands for no good reason. He was smiling in a special way—or so Bill thought, at least—and when he said, " How are you ? " it seemed to have a special, mocking sound. " In the pink," Bill answered, astonishing himself, because so far as he knew he had never used the phrase in his life before.

" Well," Cheever said to Connie, " you're in good hands now. So I'll run along."

" Yes, do," Connie said heartily. " I mean—Bill's probably hungry."

" Not at all," Bill demurred coldly, but no one heeded him. " See you to-morrow," Cheever was saying ; and he was adding, " One-fifteen ? " and Connie was replying, " Well, all right—only you'd better ring up first. About noon." And Cheever was agreeing to do that. . . .

In fact you really never heard such prolonged planning going on.

"*A demain*, then," he wound up finally. He took her hand. " Be good."

" Um-hmm."

" And remember."

He didn't say what she was to remember. He just said the word.

Connie looked gravely at him, but didn't reply.

" Can I come out now ? " Bill inquired a moment later. " Has he gone ? "

" He's gone."

" He'll be back, if I know him. Back in a flash. Let's see if we can gobble down a little food before that happens."

" You're very cross to-night," said Connie. " That's the result of living alone at a club. You get to be a crusty old bachelor."

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The hotel had a downstairs grill-room, one of those oak-and-leather grottoes. They repaired there, and took a corner table. "As a matter of fact," Connie said when they were seated, "I didn't really mean to bring Ken along. But the thing was, he didn't like it very well when I broke my dinner date with him, so he insisted on my having a cocktail with him somewhere first. So I did, at Luigi's, and then he brought me over here."

"I see."

"He's very pleased because you've left me. It seems to give him hope."

"I gathered that."

"He's dying to know what we quarrelled about, of course. But I wouldn't tell him. I just said, 'But we didn't quarrel at all, about anything. Bill and I never quarrel.' And we don't, either, do we? Not both of us. Sometimes you quarrel, but I never do. Let's not talk about it any more, anyway," she said smoothly. "Let's just have fun. Let's do something silly, like the things we used to. I know what," she added, gesturing with the menu card, "—we'll eat backward. All my life I've wanted to eat backward."

"Please?" Bill said, cupping his ear.

"Begin with dessert," said Connie. "*Profiteroles au chocolat*, or something. And then next we'll have an alligator-pear salad, and then a steak and some asparagus —and then may be a bit of fish, if we have room for it —and then finally a crab-meat cocktail with Russian dressing."

"I see. Nuts to soup."

"Certainly," said Connie. "Call the waiter and break it to him."

Bill was still trying to talk her out of this singularly ghastly plan when the maître d'hôtel approached their

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table from afar, bearing in his fingertips a large and perfect red camellia. It was unwrapped, and it was glorious, if you liked red camellias. The dew of the florist's shop still glistened on its spreading petals. "I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle," the maître d'hôtel said. "A gentleman brought this to the door just now. He said he thought you must have dropped it in the lobby."

"Why, no, I——" Connie began involuntarily, and stopped. "Oh," she said then. "Why, yes. I guess it is mine. Thank you."

There was a pause, during which the maître d'hôtel went away again. Connie looked at the flower, and Bill looked first at it and then at her expression, which was troubled. She finally lifted sombre eyes to his. "You see?" she said. "That's what I mean about Ken. He does cute things."

"Um-hmm," Bill said. "Doesn't he just! Cute as the mischief. Practically elfin, in fact."

"You used to do them once."

"Never as cute as that, I didn't. I'll thank you to keep a civil tongue in your head."

"But women love that kind of thing," said Connie, wailing. "Can't you understand?"

He merely grunted. He couldn't say no, but he certainly wasn't going to say yes.

Late that night when he got home—well, no not home, but back to that room again—he felt more disturbed about the general situation than he had at any time. The evening had gone well; in fact it had gone almost too well. They hadn't argued any more, and they had had a beautiful time, and Connie had expressed it when she said enthusiastically, "Isn't this fun? This is really how-to-be-happy-though-married. You live

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apart, and have dates with each other, and then you appreciate each other. Otherwise you don't. We've been taking each other too much for granted, you and I. Especially you."

In that speech there was the germ of the idea that was to break them up, eventually; and even now Bill had a vague sense that he wished she'd never thought of it. At the same time, he could see exactly what she meant. It was that courtship feeling that he had had when he left the club to meet her for dinner, and that returned to him and buoyed him all evening. He could be gay for her, and was; he could show off for her. It was the best-foot-forward, and all that sort of thing. "There's nobody like you when you're really like yourself," she had said. . . .

He thought about that now, at two a.m., while he prepared for bed. He lay awake for some time, reviewing the evening in his mind, turning it over slowly to see what it was made of. They had eaten their dinner backward—and enjoyed it, what was more—and Connie had insisted on topping it off with a dry Martini cocktail and a caviar canapé. Then they had discussed what to do, and after deciding to go dancing they had gone to a night police court instead, and then to a dime museum to see a trained flea named James, recommended by Connie; and then they had taken a ferry ride to Hoboken and back. By that time it was after midnight, and she had claimed that she had to go home, so he had taken her home; and in the lobby Connie had said courteously, "Would you like to come up for a minute? I'll give you a night cap."

"What would your husband say?"

"Oh, he won't mind. He trusts me. And besides, he's so big-hearted—sometimes I think he doesn't mind anything."

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"That's where you're dead wrong."

"Am I? I hope I am."

It was that passage in particular that he remembered now. Well, he thought grimly. So all right. So the thing to do was prove it to her. Quit being big-hearted, and adopt new tactics. Toughen up. Be smart. Get mean. . . .

The next day brought him a good opportunity, because she telephoned again, and said, "Look, I've decided you're my favourite dinner partner, after last night. So are you free to-night? Let's wear our Sunday bibs and go places."

Bill expressed deep regret, saying things like, "Hell, why didn't you call me sooner?" and explaining that he'd made another engagement only an hour ago. "You did?" said Connie incredulously. "Oh, you mean a business engagement."

"No. Social, as a matter of fact."

There was a short, expectant silence from Connie, and then she said, "Is that all you're going to tell me about it? You mean you're taking some girl to dinner? You are, aren't you? Some horrible little hussy of a husband-snatching girl! But who?"

"Now, now," Bill said. "Don't pry. Are we leading our own lives, or aren't we?"

"I hate you," Connie said spiritedly, and hung up.

Half a minute later she rang up again and said, "Well, then, what about to-morrow night? Or is that taken, too? I see I'll have to date you 'way ahead, you're getting so popular. Look—is she anybody I know, or isn't she? You might at least tell me that much."

"I might," Bill said, "but I'm not going to. Why, yes. To-morrow night's okay for me."

"Then write my name down in your little book,"

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said Connie. "I'll meet you at eight wherever you say. I'll be wearing a red carnation—or even maybe another red camellia, if I play my cards right. Oh, by the way—Ken definitely wants to marry me; did you know it?"

"Really?" Bill said. "Good! I'm delighted to hear his intentions are honourable. I mean to say—now I can put away my shot-gun."

They met at eight the following evening, and Connie said instantly, "How was your date?"

"Ah!" Bill said with a leer. "Sensational. How was yours?"

"Stormy," said Connie. "In fact, I've got some news for you—news you're going to like—and I'll swop it for the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. You didn't really have a date at all, did you? I don't believe you did. Let's stop this, and be serious this time. Because it's important."

So they were serious. Bill admitted that he'd spent last evening with a couple of clients, both of them male; and Connie said, "I spent it getting rid of Ken, for once and all. It's completely washed up. There, now! That's my news, and I told you you'd like it."

"I love it," Bill said. "I'm nuts about it. But how come?"

"Well, you see, it went to his head. That was the trouble."

"What went to his head?"

"Our separation. He didn't understand it," Connie said, "and I couldn't make him understand it. He thought we really meant it. And it was just like—well, I guess it always happens that way. For instance, last year, when Dottie and Red Matthews separated, I remember Dottie told me that that was how it was—that the minute you left your husband, everybody said

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to you, 'Well, splendid! At last! And high time, too! I never could see what you saw in him. . . .' And all that sort of thing," Connie concluded, buttering bread.

"This seems a little complicated," Bill said. "I'm not sure I'm following you. You mean you've been receiving congratulations all over the place?"

"No, no. Of course not. Only from Ken."

"Ah. Well, go on."

"So that was why," said Connie. She thought about it, and her eyes flashed. "It made me hate him the minute he started it. Imagine his talking that way about you and me! He even said you were *dull*! And he called you a customers' man—and a middle Western small town boy—— Well, honestly! In my whole life I've never been so furious with anybody."

"Wait, now," Bill said. "After all, let's face facts. I am a customers' man—and I am a middle-Western small town boy—and the good Lord knows I'm dull these days. I can't even remember when I wasn't, if ever. I'm glad it made you mad, but in all fairness I can't see why."

"I suppose because I love you," Connie said indignantly. "And because he's a conceited ass—and I can't bear him. Oh, don't argue with me!"

So that was that chapter. Bill checked out of the Princetown Club at ten o'clock that evening, and moved home—bag and other bag. Connie accompanied him in the taxi, and waited outside the club while he packed. It was a gala home-coming, and there was even something distinctly bridal about it. "It's a pity I'm not bigger," she said wistfully, when they reached their door. "I mean I feel as though I ought to carry you in over the threshold."

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THERE was then a peaceful little interlude that lasted a whole seven months. It even lulled Bill into a sense of security—which was unfortunate, as it turned out. But it was understandable, because Connie behaved angelically all that time. She said herself that she had reformed, and that she was tired of parties and night life, and even that she guessed she was really a home body at heart. "A what?" said Bill. "A home body," said Connie firmly.

It did almost look that way for the moment. Quiet evenings. Simple pleasures. Backgammon and cribbage. Early to bed and early to rise. That was the winter Connie wheeled her own baby carriage—in fact, twice or three times—and it was also the winter she took up knitting, collected chafing-dish recipes, gave buffet suppers, played pencil-and-paper games, subscribed to a book club, read news magazines, and would have taken a course of home studies, except that she couldn't decide what in. "But in *something*," she kept saying determinedly to Bill. "Because my mind could stand improving, don't you think? Or don't you?"

And she discovered the unemployed, and even did something about them, working at a relief place three or four afternoons a week. She also gave away most of Bill's clothes in an impulsive moment. It was a busy winter, all in all; and the spring was like it, only more so. In March Pat had the measles, and in April there was Bill's acute appendix—an eight-hundred-dollar item by the time it was all over with. That was really a blow, of course; and blows like that never come singly; and so in June Bill's parents in Ohio had a motor

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accident—not very serious, but rather costly, what with one thing and another. They were both in the hospital for a while, and Bill had to go there twice ; and then, of course, the people with whose car they had collided sued them, or tried to.

Summer arrived in the midst of all this, and the first heat-wave wafted Connie into a steamship agency, where she bought tickets for Bermuda. "I didn't really plan to," she explained to Bill, "but I was walking down Fifth Avenue, and what did I see but this poster." She and Pat sailed late in June, accompanied by Janet Chisholm and Janet's baby, Stinky, and both the infants' nurses. They rented a small white house with the blue Bermuda sea in its big front windows, and Connie kept writing Bill that this was Heaven and he must hurry right down. "On my water wings, or how?" Bill wanted to know—and with good reason. Sometimes it seemed that the harder you worked the poorer you got ; and that summer was one of the times.

So he didn't see Connie at all from the end of June until mid-September. By that time she was off on a new tangent, as he duly learned. He never knew exactly what it was that happened to her during that summer, although he heard everything she did, just as he always had before. Whatever happened was an intangible thing : it took place in her mind. Perhaps it was the influence of Janet, who was meditating a divorce from Chuck, and who (if Bill knew Janet) could talk of nothing else. Or perhaps it was simply another of those phases that Connie was always going through —in fact it looked very much like one, in its outward manifestations. Once again she had altered her whole appearance, and even her type. "Look, I'm new," she said enthusiastically to Bill, as she stepped off the boat.

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In the first place, she had one of those deep and total tans that are only acquired by working at it, and there proved not to be a white streak on it anywhere, or a bathing-suit mark, so that Bill inquired whether Bermuda had gone nudist-colony, or what? "Not at all," said Connie. "I had a small tent with no top to it, and I took sun-baths every day in that." It was a beautiful tan really, a kind of rare old gold, and the first thing she did when she got back to town was to buy two or three white evening dresses in which to show it off at its best. She also bought a sun-lamp with which to preserve it, while she was about it.

There were other changes. It seemed that the *gamine* era had run its course, and she was bored with it now; and all the new clothes she bought for autumn had a sleek sophistication, and the stiff little skirts with pockets in them were gone. Similarly, the fluff of ringlets that had covered her head was straightened out now into a long bob that curved inward slightly at the ends. And she had new eyebrows designed for herself, and even a new mouth—bigger and better, she said. She applied it with a paint brush, and blotted it with a Pullman towel, and it all took quite a while to do, and the whole process fascinated Bill. "Women!" he kept muttering; and "What next?"

"Don't you like me this way?" Connie asked him several times, and usually he said he did, although the truth was that he wasn't sure. He didn't know what it all meant, exactly—or what it portended, if anything—and once he said, "I can't quite make out what you're supposed to be, this time. A *femme fatale*, is it?"

He felt faintly alarmed when she pounced on the phrase and said eagerly, "Is that what I look like? Oh, I hope so! I never thought of that."

She thought about it forthwith, and her whole expression

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changed, becoming languid and sultry, and it was evident that she was rehearsing the new rôle then and there. "Hey, wait!" Bill said, now definitely perturbed. "As you were, there, baby! I didn't mean to put any ideas into your head."

"Why not?" she said. "Wouldn't you like to be married to a *femme fatale*? I should think it would be very exciting."

"I should think so, too," said Bill, "and may the kind Lord spare me. What I need is less excitement, not more."

"Well, and you had it," Connie reminded him. "You had it all last winter. So now it's time for something else to happen, don't you really think? It doesn't do for married couples to get in a rut."

"There's no danger in this family, it seems."

"We were even humdrum," Connie said ruefully. "I was thinking about that this summer. It was all wrong, of course. For us, I mean. We're not humdrum people. At least, if we are, I refuse to be."

One of the first things she did about it was to whistle in the lost lads—all the half-forgotten Bakes and Doggos of a year or more ago—plus a whole new contingent, slightly older. There was even a thirty-five-year-old poet, who looked more like a thug than a thug did, and who talked like a wisecracking newspaperman in a very bright movie by Hecht and MacArthur. And from Governor's Island or somewhere there was one of those Army officers who obviously wouldn't be worth a second glance in civilian clothes, but who persisted in wearing his uniform and looking great, come hell or high water. "Take it off, we know you," Bill often yearned to say.

The new, suave, streamlined Connie handled this bumper crop with brilliant ease, and even made it mix

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and mingle pretty well, which was an achievement. Once again she held salons at cocktail time, and almost daily, and Bill supposed she didn't know that the liquor bills shot up to the skies as a result—and certainly he didn't tell her. She was paying for her own clothes nowadays, all of them, and that bothered him enough. And Oliphant's salary, too, the past few months. And her own vacations, and Pat's. Connie was paying for a lot of things, in spite of all his brave, big talk ; and it was just too bad if he couldn't buy the drinks for the boys, no matter how numerous they were. Better be slow with the rent than feel like a heel as a host and a husband. Better miss the football games this autumn, even. Worse coming to worst.

Connie went to all the games—indeed, she went everywhere again, like mad—but it developed presently that the old programme of beaux and dates had lost its charm along with its novelty, and that a deeper restlessness possessed her now than could be satisfied so readily as that. She was quite frank about it, in admission, and in discussion. " I'd better get a job, I guess, or something," she said to Bill that autumn. " Or have another baby, only you say we can't afford to. Or I might try to get on the stage—although I don't suppose I'd be any good on the stage, except to look at. Maybe I'd better just be a model. Anyway, I've got to do something, or I'm going to get into trouble."

" You are, eh ? " Bill said glumly. " What kind of trouble ? Why do you say that ? "

" Because I'm bored. I haven't got enough to do—and I'm tired of all the things I do do. And you still work all the time, and I've given up hoping you're ever going to stop it. And I miss you so," said Connie, in a small lost voice. " I miss the old you. Terribly. I keep telling you that, but it doesn't do any good. I feel

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as though you'd gone away, and I haven't got anybody to play with any more, or anybody to be happy with. We used to be so happy, don't you remember? And now look at us."

"Um-hmm," Bill said. "Now look at us. I have to make a living——"

"There're more things in life than making a living, though. That's just the point."

"But they come second. They have to. At least someti——"

"Not with me!" Connie cried passionately. "And they shouldn't! They come first."

"Look, my sweet," Bill said. "You're rich. You don't understand what this is about, at all. But try to be patient with me, will you? It isn't going to be this way for ever. Just now I've got my tail in a crack, and I've got to work like hell till I get somewhere again —but don't say you've given up hoping I ever will, because that breaks my heart. I mean, if you don't believe in me, what's the good of anything?"

"Of course I believe in you. It isn't that."

"It sounds like that."

"Well, it isn't. Oh, darling, you know it isn't! Of course I believe in you!"

"Well, then," Bill said amiably, "—darling yourself —shut up, and show it."

"You make me feel ashamed."

"Maybe I mean to."

There was a temporary lull after that particular little conversation; but it was only temporary. In one form or another, the subject kept coming up again later— whatever the subject was precisely. Bill was a long time putting a name to it. You could call it Connie's restlessness, but you couldn't let it go at that, because

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if you did you were crazy. It was so palpably something more. You had to look beneath it, and into it, and all around it, trying to see what it really was—and yet trying not to, in a way. It looked too much like actual, downright unhappiness.

Nothing came of her idea about a job, but she did many other kinds of things that autumn, to fill every minute. She did everything but sleep, it seemed to Bill. In addition to the social programme, her activities ranged all the way from making her own Christmas cards, and pushing furniture around in rooms, to bringing home an orphanage one day to play with Pat, and flying to California, suddenly, another day. That was a fine thing, that was. Bill nearly smacked her for that one. She flew out with Dottie Matthews, quite unpremeditatedly—after going to Newark Airport simply to see Dottie off. The first Bill knew about it was a telegram beginning, "DON'T LOOK NOW BUT I'M IN PITTSBURGH," and explaining airily. It was a bad day, too, with freezing sleet, and fog low on the ground.

That was in December, and she stayed a week in Hollywood, and then came home by way of Reno, where she stopped for two days to see Janet. Janet was finally there, and had been there something like three weeks, six days, eleven hours and twenty-two minutes when Connie arrived—so Connie reported to Bill on her return home. "That's the way they count, out there," she said. "And I don't blame them. I didn't care much for Reno myself, from what I saw of it. I was surprised."

"Why surprised?"

"I don't know," said Connie. "I just was. So many people I know have been there—and, of course, it kind of runs in my family, too."

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She seemed to feel that that answered that, and she was pensive for a moment, and then she added, "But I'd hate it. All those droves of women—and hardly a man in sight. And all that grisly ranch life. They even made me ride a horse. And poor Janet, in a frightful tizzy about everything. She cries once an hour, on the hour. I mean actually."

"Ah," Bill said. "Well, there you are. I'm beginning to be glad you went. May I say I hope the whole thing will be a lesson to you?"

Connie nodded briskly, as though admitting that it had been.

"She should have got a Florida divorce instead," she summed the lesson up. "You just winter at Palm Beach or somewhere, and there's simply no comparison."

"I see. That's how you'll do it, is it?"

"If I ever do it, yes."

There was a slight pause, and then Bill said, "Look. Smile when you say that, will you? Bat an eyelash. Anyway, do *something*. Don't just say it that way—as though it was all planned."

"Well, it isn't, of course," said Connie. "And I'll probably never do it. But sometimes I think it would be awfully good for us if I did. There's nothing like a divorce to make people appreciate each other—I mean, always providing they're still in love. It's even better than a separation. And more glamorous-making."

"More what?"

"Me, I mean," said Connie. "It would make me more glamorous to you. Well, and I suppose vice versa. It would be like that time we lived apart, don't you remember?"

"You mean those two days?"

"I mean those two days," she said sentimentally. "They were wonderful. We had dates together, and

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we were gay, and in-betweentimes you told me where to get off—and all in all, I think that was the way to live."

"My God!" Bill said. "Is this up again? 'Princeton-Club-Here-I-Come,' or something? I refuse. This time I'm going to stay straight where I am."

"Well," she said. "But we can reminisce about it, can't we? It really was a very good idea, is all I'm saying. In many ways it was the best idea we ever had. It cleared the atmosphere, and it settled Ken, don't you remember? You remember Ken."

"Why, so I do! What a memory I've got, to be sure. Like a steel trap. Whatever became of good old Kenny-Wenny, anyway?"

"He's probably somewhere," Connie said absently. "Don't keep interrupting my train of thought. Well, and then when we got back together again, it was like a second honeymoon. At least it was for a while. And all in all, it couldn't have been better for us, the whole thing. Every marriage needs something like that to happen to it, every now and then. Don't you see?" she wound up earnestly. "You have to have ideas like that. You have to do things about marriage, or it just all goes flat. You have to work at it, and make a business of it. Or an art."

"Yes, so I've heard."

"Once I knew a married couple who didn't really get married," Connie said. "They just eloped to New Jersey somewhere, and sent telegrams to everybody saying that they just had been married—but they hadn't, and they never were. They simply came back to New York, after sending the telegrams, and settled down together, and called themselves Mr. and Mrs., and were terribly happy. It was exactly like a marriage *except* that it really wasn't one, and they didn't feel bound,

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and so it kept on being a real love affair for them, and they were always happier than the couples they knew who really were married, just because of that. The psychology."

"This is all past tense," Bill noted shrewdly. "Where are these love-birds now?"

Connie looked slightly downcast. "Well, they broke up, finally," she said, "after five years. But while it lasted it was absolutely idyllic. You never saw two people so happy, ever. And it would have broken up anyway, if it was going to."

"I can't see that this proves a thing," Bill said. "What's the point of it, if any? And what's it got to do with us?"

"Nothing," Connie said, "except that sometimes I wish we'd tried it. Somehow I think it might have worked out better."

"Nice for Pat, too."

Connie pretended not to hear that. "It all goes back to my original theory," she added dreamily.

"What original theory?"

"You remember, about marriage. About how I should have been married several times, unhappily, before I married you. I told you—I remember telling you about it on our honeymoon. Only you wouldn't listen, you just scoffed."

"I did, eh," Bill said. "Funny fellow. Why on earth do you suppose I scoffed at that?"

But Connie wasn't listening. This time she didn't have to pretend. Her eyes had a far-away expression, and they were softly bright, and it seemed that she was back on that honeymoon ship again. "I remember that night so well." she said. "It was the last night out before New York, and we were sitting up on the top deck—don't you remember? And the wind was

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blowing in that wailing way it does at the top of ships, and there was starlight, and the smokestacks were doing that terrific thing they do—marching along against the sky as though nothing could ever stop them—— Oh, darling," she said, choking suddenly, "we were so much in love then! That's what's the matter now, I guess. We were too much in love—and now I'm spoiled, and I can't take anything less.

"And I won't," she concluded decisively, in the next quick breath. "I'm just not going to have it this way. There are things we can do about it, and I'm going to think what they are, and do them. It's too good a marriage not to save."

"Look," Bill said. "Wait, now. Let me get this straight. You mean you think we're not in love any more? Is that what you're saying?"

"Yes, but not in the same way. Not as we were then."

"You're speaking for yourself, aren't you?" Bill said. His face had gone quite white. "You must be. Because I'm still as much in love with you as I ever was. More than on our honeymoon, if you want to know. More every year."

"But differently," said Connie. "It's different with us both. Oh, of course, we still adore each other—but it's not the same, and you know it's not. Something's gone out of it. The breathlessness, or something. And now it's just affectionate, and tender, and all that—but it's not enough. Most of the time we're more like a brother and sister than anything else. We're best friends, and that's about all. And I can't bear it."

"Neither can I, if it's true."

"It is true."

That was how it began—and that was the night they talked for hours, saying all the things they had said

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before, again and again, and many new things. That was the crucial conversation, and they both knew it all the while. And in the end Bill said, "Well. What's the answer? What do you suggest?"

"I don't know exactly," Connie said. "I don't know what to try first. But I suppose the logical thing is another vacation from each other, don't you think? A real one, I mean—not just a few days, like this last one. I'll go away somewhere again, and really stay away this time, and that'll give us both a chance to think things out, and decide what to do. And then if that doesn't work——"

"Yes," said Bill. "And then if that doesn't work——"

"Well, but it should. It probably will," said Connie hopefully. "After all, vacations from each other are always good for people, no matter what their trouble is. Everybody knows that."

"Um-hmm," Bill said. "They're either good or they're terrible. Take last summer, for instance. In the light of all that's happened since, I can't see that that helped us much, can you?"

"But maybe this will. Now that we've thrashed things out, I mean. Now that we know where we are."

"What do you mean 'we'?" Bill said. "I don't know where I am—from nothing."

She waited until after Christmas, a delay of two weeks only, and then sailed for the French Riviera to visit Greg and Mickey—her father and his wife—who had taken a villa for the winter at Cap Ferrat. It was a place to go, as Connie said, not very enthusiastically. She loved Greg dearly, but Mickey had never been her favourite stepmother. They were too nearly of an age, for one thing. "We have beau trouble," said Connie. "Always have had, and always will have."

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Still, it was a place to go, and she couldn't think of any other place, and so she went, with a great crowd of friends and people seeing her off. Bill was the last to leave the ship, and Connie clung to him, and cried a little, and the gangplank had to be held an extra minute or two, so that he could get off. It probably didn't mean anything, though, he said to himself afterwards. No sense in feeling cheered by that—although she almost never cried. It had been a long day, and a midnight sailing, and she was probably just tired.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SHE stayed away all that winter. January, February March. She hadn't taken Pat with her this time, so Bill had somebody, and something. Pat was getting cuter by the minute—she was two that year. She called Bill "Ix," no one knew why; and she was his slave, and this was mutual. She looked like Connie, as she always had. She would grow up to be like her. Men not yet three years old were in for it, Bill could tell that.

He came home as early as he could, those afternoons of the winter of Connie's absence, thinking that Pat might be feeling bereft and lonely in an infantile way, and wishing to spend as much time with her as possible before her bedtime. He read to her by the hour, and they played little games. Then Miss Oliphant put her to bed, and he was there to tuck her in and turn the light out, and to hear her prayers. Connie talked baby

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talk to her, but Bill didn't believe in that, and their conversations were very grown up, and Pat even acquired some grave big words, which enchanted him. He tried not to quote them to people at the office, or to men he lunched with, but he didn't have much luck. The same was true of his stern efforts not to show snapshots of Pat, of which he took quantities. He carried them in his pockets, and whipped them out at the drop of a hat.

Connie kept writing him, but not too regularly, and not as lengthily as she once had. And no illustrations. Sometimes it wasn't a letter, it was just a post card—the terrible red-and-purple ones you bought in Europe, or the comic ones. She seemed to be in Cap Ferrat most of the time, but once she took a motor trip through Switzerland and Belgium, and another time she wrote that she was in Paris with Mickey, getting some clothes. It was a long time before she even mentioned coming home.

Well. There was one good feature—this was his chance to clean up things, to get a lot of things out of the way; and to that end he laboured diligently all that winter. He had a little luck, too, for a change; and there was what looked to be a kind of business upturn, nationally, and personally for him. The worst was over, he kept telling himself, and from now on he would have more freedom, he would feel less harassed, and more like a human being again. Everything was going to be all right, in fact. It had to be.

He even had a little leisure time now—for another change—and then he felt his loneliness and thought, "Darling, come back." Once or twice he almost cabled her. But only almost. Evenings were the problem, and he took to dropping into clubs and bars that hadn't seen him for a long time, looking for friends—or anybody,

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it didn't really matter—to talk to. He called up the couples that he and Connie used to like best, and after being scolded roundly for neglect, was invited to dinner or parties. Once or twice he got quite high, and he was merry as in the past, and everybody said, "Thank God, you're back in form again." Once he came home really drunk, at half-past seven in the morning—that was after a class reunion dinner in February—and it developed later that he had undressed in the living-room, all over the living-room, and that he had thrown his dress shirt into the fireplace; and that was a very good sign. In the gay old days, when drunk, he had always thrown his dress shirt into the fireplace, saying, "There, damn you."

And once, at a dinner party at the house of some people named Thayer, he had run into a girl named Frances Nelson, who was a distant cousin of Connie's. Bill had always liked her, because she was direct and crisp, and a little bitter, and pretty consistently amusing. There was also the fact that she wasn't hard to look at, and she played a bang-up game of almost any game you could mention—except possibly love. You didn't have to worry about sentiment with Frances; and you could be nice to her without her assuming—as so many fool women did, or would—that you meant something in particular by it. She knew that you meant you liked her, that you thought she was a good kid. That was that.

So towards the last of Connie's absence he saw quite a little of Frances, taking her here and there, to theatres or movies or just the newsreel—she was a newsreel sort of girl—and dropping in at Tony's or Twenty-One for a drink afterwards. She was the world's best listener, and he talked to her a lot, mostly about Connie; and of course in the end he was more confidential than he'd

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meant to be. He told her the whole story, with only a few discreet expurgations; and it felt fine to get it off his chest, and it helped to clarify everything.

"So you blame yourself entirely," Frances said thoughtfully when she had heard it all.

"Well, and why not? It's been entirely my own fault."

"Connie's a darling," Frances said. "There's nobody like her. But she could be wrong, you know."

"She wasn't this time, though," Bill said. "You haven't been around much these past two years—but I assure you I was simply terrible. You should have seen me."

"Well, and I did, once or twice," said Frances. "And you certainly were. I'm not arguing that point."

But when Bill added that you couldn't blame Connie for getting fed up, Frances merely said, "Mm." It was a strangely unsatisfactory answer, as he thought of it later. And strangely unlike Frances, who usually told you just what she thought in full. It bothered him afterwards, and he made a mental note to take it up with her again next time he talked to her alone. But then he forgot, and there were only one or two next times like that, anyway, because it was suddenly April and Connie had cabled that she was sailing for home.

She came down the gangplank dripping orchids—the little green ones that she liked—and Bill's first thought was an irritated recollection of the fact that they had florists' shops on liners, for the benefit of girls like his. Life on land wasn't troubling enough, so they'd had to go and do that. She was wearing something black and slim and very smart indeed, and little animals were nipping at each other round her shoulders—round and round—and her hat was a madcap affair, like a chip with a chin-strap. She embraced Bill with gratifying

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ardour and asked for Pat and hung to his arm as they went to collect her luggage, chattering all the way. The luggage turned out to consist of about thirty pieces, all told, as against about twenty when she went away. It took quite a while to assemble it all, and to get an inspector.

While they were waiting, sitting side by side on a trunk and holding hands, Connie said suddenly, in mid-sentence, "Oh, and I forgot! I've got something to show you."

"What might that be?"

"It's over under the 'L's.' Come on and see it."

"Something tells me I don't want to see it," Bill said darkly. "I've already seen it, haven't I? Wasn't it standing beside you at the rail when the ship docked?"

"Yes, it was," said Connie. "On one side of me. That was the purser on the other side, a really very cunning purser."

"An absolute sweetie pie, in fact," Bill said. "I saw him. Too, I mean. I was surprised it wasn't the captain. You're not slipping, are you, baby?"

They both smiled, and Connie shook her head decisively, and Bill said, "Ah, I see. He was just busy on the bridge. I might have guessed that. Well, but never mind about these sailors, anyway," he continued. "Seafaring men don't worry me—at least not from Quarantine on in. The question is, who's this fellow we're talking about? Who was the landlubber on your left?"

"His name is Lambert. That's what he's doing under the 'L's,'" Connie explained; and she gazed off down the customs shed, in the right alphabetical direction.

"That's a nice profile you've got," Bill remarked

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after a pause. "And now can I have the eyes again? And the undivided attention? There's a good girl."

"I was just trying to see if I could see him from here——"

"That was what I was afraid you were doing."

"—so I could point him out to you," Connie concluded chidingly.

"You don't need to do that," Bill said. "I saw him, I tell you. As a matter of fact, his image is already graven on my soul. He reminded me of Cheever. Worse I cannot say. Another glamour guy, is that it? Another pretty boy bit the dust? Look, now—this wouldn't be where I came in, would it? Or would it?"

"I love you when you snort and carry on," said Connie, beaming at him. "I really love you very much, anyway. Did you know that?"

"I hear it," Bill said. "And I take it well. I practically feel no pain, in fact. But only practically—what with one thing and another. I mean to say, don't try to change the subject at this critical point. I want to hear more about this man before I'm a minute older. So his name's Lambert, is it? What's his first name? Who is he? What does he do? Where'd you find him?"

"Not till on the ship," said Connie. "And his first name's Julian, and he's——"

"Just as I suspected. Fits him like a glove, too."

"Do you want to hear about him, or don't you?" Connie demanded. "Well, then, you be quiet. He's Julian Lambert IVth, and he's in Wall Street, just like you. He's some kind of banker—the kind that has no bank. And he's thirty-eight years old. He was even in the war—he was a flier. Still, he seems quite young. And he's really nothing like Ken, if that's any comfort

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to you. He doesn't even look like him when you get closer. Not a bit."

"I can't wait to get closer. Don't promise me that if it isn't true, will you? Well, but go on."

"And he plays bridge," said Connie. "In fact I think that's what he chiefly does. He even wrote a book about it once, and he's perfectly wonderful at it. In any list of the ten best bridge players in the country, he'd be eleventh."

"Did he tell you that himself?"

"Oh, no," said Connie. "He wouldn't put it that way. He's very literal-minded. Come on over and meet him, and see."

"Unh-uh," Bill said. "Not me. Let the mountain come over here. Mohammed is keeping his seat this time. Right on this comfortable trunk."

"But I told him I'd bring you over there and introduce you. So you'll have to come," said Connie, getting down off the trunk herself. "Because, I mean, you wouldn't want him to think you were mad at him, would you? Already? Or jealous of him, or anything? Well, then, you'd better come along."

So Bill went along. "A fine thing, this is!" he grumbled, en route. And, "Travel is so broadening. That's what I always say." And, "Julian Lambert IVth, eh? Not content with naming one child that——" And, "Listen, what's the matter with that ship you were on? Didn't they have any signs up, telling you to beware of card-sharpers on board?"

"Oh, darling," Connie said happily, "it's good to be back with you!"

They dodged a baggage truck, and she added, in the same ecstatic tone, "I can't wait to hear what you think of him after you've met him."

"I can tell you one thing right now," Bill said, dodging

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another baggage truck. "What I think of him is going to depend a great deal on what *you* think of him."

"It shouldn't, though," said Connie blandly. "Why, Bill, that's silly of you! Surely you're old enough to make your mind up for yourself."

Thus they reached the letter L; and they turned in under it. There was a vast amount of stylish luggage there, great wardrobe trunks, and pigskin cases and those blonde ones with the stripes, and most of it seemed to belong to a bustling British valet, and the valet seemed to belong to this man Lambert, body and soul.

The man himself was standing there, leaning backward on a walking-stick; and the top of the stick was padded with a pair of gloves he had in his hand. He was one of those lean, rangy, graceful individuals, and he was dressed with that English carelessness that takes such infinite care. But Connie had been right—he really didn't look at all like Cheever, except for his size and his clothes. He had a sensible sort of face, rather pleasant and plain, with brown eyes and brown hair. It gave Bill quite a turn, that face. It belonged to a man he was going to like, in spite of himself; and he knew it then and there.

"Well, here he is," Connie said to them both, indiscriminately. She named no names. In fact that was all there ever was to their introduction.

They had to take it themselves from there, and they did, with a quick, hard handclasp, and a mutual smile that turned out to be bigger than either one of them had expected. Meanwhile Bill was aware that Connie was watching them both in a pleased, possessive way—he was even aware that she was looking sweetly smug, and demurely mischievous. Cat-swallowed-canary. "Wait till I get her home," he thought

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fumingly. Aloud, in the same instant, his voice was assuring Lambert that he was glad to meet him ; and it sounded true, and hearty. And Lambert, not to be outdone, was saying, " I've heard a lot about you, Bill." And there it was. First names already. Good old Julian, this would be.

All these impressions were confused, being broken by surrounding uproars—the cacophony, the tumbling of trunks, the clatter of truck wheels everywhere, and a woman near them wailing that she'd lost her keys and now what? There was even a baby crying, and a terrier yelping. Connie put both hands over her ears, and made a wild-eyed face, and Bill said, " ' L ' seems to be breaking loose under the ' L's,' " a remark he viewed with deep disfavour, especially after he had uttered it. He was startled and embarrassed when good old Julian laughed appreciatively. The fellow certainly wasn't going to be hard to amuse if this kept up.

And it did keep up, during the next moments, while they stood there talking. You never saw a better audience than good old Julian was. This was particularly true when Connie said anything—no matter what. Whenever she even began to speak, Julian looked gleefully expectant, and his big smile started broadening right away, and he made chortling sounds. " And all in all," Bill thought, observing this phenomenon with mournful interest, " he's in bad shape. He's gone clear off the deep end, the poor guy. No doubt about it."

Julian even admitted it the very first chance he got. " How was the crossing? " Bill had asked him, and Julian answered that it had been " splendid—thanks to Connie " ; and he fixed Bill with a frank brown eye, and smiled apologetically, and added, " I'm in love with

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your wife, you know, Bill. I may as well tell you. I hope you don't mind."

"Why, no," Bill said mildly. "Not at all. I don't blame you. I am myself, as a matter of fact."

Connie chose to be facetious, and she said, "Oh, now, you two! Stop spoofing me. I'll bet you say that about every wife you meet—the pair of you." But Bill and Julian didn't even hear her, being preoccupied. They were still eyeing each other—gently but firmly, somehow—over the top of her head.

Julian's chauffeur with Julian's car was waiting when they left the pier, and Bill and Connie were driven uptown in Julian's style. "What, no motor-cycle escort?" Bill said to himself. "And no sirens?" It really did seem a strange omission, in these fancy circumstances. A bigger car than this could hardly have got through the streets at all, and furthermore it was but one of three cars in a cavalcade. Behind it came a station wagon—also Julian's—with Connie's trunks; and the valet in a taxi with the hand luggage brought up the rear.

"This is very nice for us," Connie said gratefully when they first set out. "Imagine not having to cope with a thing. You're such a help," she said warmly to Julian.

"Yeah, this is fine," Bill echoed, also warmly; and of course in a way it was; but he foresaw already what the trouble with it would be. . . . The trouble with it would be that the least he could do, when they reached their apartment house, would be to invite Julian up for a drink; and Julian would probably accept. And Julian certainly did accept, when the moment came. He snapped at the offer. "Are you sure I won't be in the way?" he asked, with a kind of pathetic eagerness.

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So up he came—and that was Connie's home-coming, so long looked forward to. Reunion of three. Or rather, of four, counting Pat. The new family circle.

It was amazing how soon you got used to Julian, though, and how beautifully he fitted in. He was still with them two hours later—but the thing was that, by that time, even Bill felt genuinely hospitable about having him about. The fellow grew on you, and there was no use talking. Far from wearing out his welcome, he made it come true where it hadn't been true. And he wasn't in the way at all, and you didn't have to entertain him—instead you gave him jobs to do, as though he'd been here always, or you just left him in the living-room with Pat and he was happy. When you came back you found him telling her tall tales, and fashioning funny men for her out of his handkerchief.

That was how it was during the first hour, while Bill and Connie rushed about, answering the telephone, and opening trunks, and dumping suitcases out on to beds. Connie hadn't meant to start unpacking right away, but she got into it by trying to find the presents she had brought for Bill and Pat—innumerable presents, it appeared, and all of them skilfully cached in remote corners and unlikely pockets. "You didn't by any chance smuggle all these things in?" Bill inquired with masculine severity. "Of course I did," said Connie, with feminine complacency.

She had to unpack almost everything, to unearth anything; and Bill made a pretence of having to help her, so he could be where she was. They finally carried all the presents into the living-room, to be opened; and it was at that point—or, at least, that was one of the times—that Julian tried to take his leave, but they

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wouldn't let him go, because they'd hardly seen him. They had even forgotten all about that drink for him, in the excitement.

Then other people began dropping in to welcome Connie home, and an informal party started, and increased and flourished, during the second hour. It lasted until early evening, as a matter of fact—it was one of those parties that gather momentum and simply don't break up. And Julian still fitted in beautifully, and he was Bill's assistant bartender, and he made instant friends with everybody . . . and in the end he said, "Look, what about dinner?" There were ten or twelve of them still left, and it was nearly eight o'clock, by that time.

"We could go over to my place," he continued, looking hopeful and a little diffident, and altogether charming. "I mean, and have a bite," he said. "Couldn't you all do that? It isn't far. I'll just call up—— Or, of course, we can dine at a restaurant if you'd rather——"

One couple managed to resist him, but only because they had theatre tickets. All the others did go, including Bill and Connie. And the bite was a banquet, spirited up somehow, and Julian's place was a duplex penthouse, and it was all so super-super that it could easily have been a little overwhelming, or a little comical, or both—but Julian was still good old Julian, so it wasn't. Not a bit.

On the contrary, it was tremendous fun, and everybody stayed till late, playing ping-pong in the games-room, and being windblown on the terrace, and drinking in the bar, and making every kind of music—from pipe-organ to drum. The house had everything there ever was to play with, anyway. As Connie said to Bill, in the course of a little off-stage *tête-à-tête* they held at

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one point, "It makes even you see how lonely Julian really is. All these toys and things."

"Yeah, I suppose it does."

"He's sweet," said Connie. "Don't you think? He's one of the sweetest people I've ever known. I'm so glad you like him, darling. Well, but I knew you would."

"I haven't said I liked him, have I?"

"But you do, of course. I can tell. You liked him the first minute."

"That may be," Bill said. "And it may not. I repeat that it depends. I mean I still can't quite make out how you feel about him yourself—so I guess you'd better tell me. And quick," he added miserably.

"Why, Bill!"

"Well. That's the way it is."

"I'm very fond of him," said Connie, speaking slowly and thoughtfully now. "And I'm awfully sorry for him. And that's about all—at least, so far."

"I see. You think there might be more in future."

"But maybe not," said Connie. "It's a little too soon to tell. After all, I've only known him four days—and only three evenings—and all that time I was too excited over being about to see you, to pay much attention to him or anyone else."

"You were," Bill said, feeling pleased but not especially reassured. "Well, and when that wears off—then what?"

"That's what I don't know," said Connie. "Except that it's up to you not to let it wear off. And that reminds me—I'm simply furious with you," she stated astonishingly.

She seemed to mean it, and after staring at her to make sure he'd really heard it, he said, "You are? But why, for heaven's sake? What have I done?"

"You probably didn't even miss me," Connie said

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aggrievedly, "—you were having such a high old time. I keep hearing about it. And it isn't that I'm selfish—I'm glad you had fun while I was away—but what hurts my feelings is that you waited till I went away to have it. I mean, everybody tells me how gay you were at parties, and the point is that if you'd been gay at parties before I went away, I never would have gone away in the first place. Or even if you'd been gay at home. Or especially if you had. Well, and so, naturally, I feel——"

"Whoa, now," Bill said. "Back up a little. Would you mind just running through that again? Who says I had a high old time, to begin with? I had nothing of the ki——"

"Everybody says so," Connie said. "All our friends. Everybody here to-night, and everybody this afternoon. Oh, of course, not in so many words—but they all seem to take a fiendish delight in letting me know that they saw you around places, and that you were in wonderful form. I suppose they think it serves me right for going away and leaving you for so long. They don't know I just did it as a medicinal measure."

"Nobody quite knows that," Bill couldn't resist saying. "I'm not certain of it myself, are you? Three months seems something of an overdose—of any medicine. Or at least——"

"Did it really?" Connie interrupted joyfully. "Seem so, I mean? Oh, then it worked, and you did miss me! And that was why, was it?"

"That was why what?"

"Why you went out so much," said Connie, "—and why you gave my cousin Frances such a whirl, in that surprising way. It was just because you were lonely, and not because you wanted to? And not because you think my cousin Frances is attractive? You don't

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really, do you? I admit she's nice," said Connie generously, "and, at times, rather witty. But no sex appeal. Those tailored suits and things. And those quite large, sensible feet. She's really not your type at all, I shouldn't think. Or is she?"

"Baby," Bill said, feeling much, much better now, "—you're killing me. Why, you little cat, meowing at Frances! What's the big idea?"

"I'm jealous, is the big idea," said Connie unhesitatingly. "I'm jealous, and I'm furious with her, too, if you want to know. Imagine, my own cousin! Well, anyway, my second cousin. Family ties are nothing to her, it seems. I mean I always thought blood was thicker than water—but no."

"I can't be hearing right," Bill said gleefully. "You don't really mean a word of this, do you? You're just making it up. Because if there's anybody in the world you don't have to worry about, it's Frances—and you know it perfectly well. And even if she were somebody you had to worry about, what kick would you have coming, may I ask? As long as we're on the subject? Because look at the worrying I have to do, year in and year out, about this guy and that guy. Look at the worrying I've got on the docket right now, as far as that goes. And yet just let me take good old Frances out to dinner a couple of times——"

"It was more than a couple of times, I hear," said Connie. "It was lots of times. And, besides, she isn't very old—and she probably isn't as good as all that. And, anyway, you and I are entirely different, and that's the whole point. I've got a very jealous nature, and I've never pretended I haven't—whereas you're completely free from jealousy, of course, and you don't mind these things. And that's the difference."

"Yeah! That's my story, anyway."

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"Well, then!" Connie said, with a glint in her eye. "There you are. It isn't my fault if you're stuck with it—so don't take it out on me."

"You know damn well I mind——" Bill started to say; but Connie had spoken again, so he stopped.

"What was that?"

"Nothing."

"I thought you said something more."

"I simply said, 'And I'm still furious,'" Connie repeated indomitably. "And I am."

CHAPTER NINE

IN the week or two that followed, life was very odd indeed; and Bill kept thinking agitatedly, "Hey, what's going on here?" Sometimes he thought it was merely that he was being punished—via good old Julian—for what Connie now persisted in referring to as "l'affaire Frances"; and then at other times it seemed more serious than that, by far.

It was life for three, in any case. Julian was nearly always with them. To be numerically precise, it was life for four, most of the time—and Frances was the fourth. Connie kept including her, relentlessly. Frances herself didn't quite understand why this was, but Connie explained it to Bill, who inquired. "I'm throwing her at your head, of course," she said, with calm candour. "What did you think I was doing?"

Bill shook the head in question. "Me, I'm a simple soul," he said. "I thought maybe you liked her. Or

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I thought perhaps you were planning to try to marry her off to Julian, or something."

"Why, certainly not," said Connie. "I wouldn't rob you. That would be mean."

Bill gave her a glare, and she nodded at him kindly.

"And, besides," she said then, "I'm saving Julian for myself, in case I need him."

"Well, that's more like it. Now we're getting somewhere near the truth."

"After all, I might need him," Connie continued in a musing voice. "A wife can never tell. I mean, for example, if you should want to marry Frances, I might marry him."

Bill reflected that this whole week had been full of goofy conversations, and that he was getting used to it. He was getting so he didn't even argue, except lightly.

"No wedding bells for you, then, baby," he retorted now. "You may as well give up the whole idea."

"She'd make you a good wife, though," Connie said. "The kind you've always wanted. You wouldn't have a worry in the world, or a moment's concern, with Frances. Wherever you put her, there you'd find her, and she'd never even so much as look at another man, and it would be wonderful for you. You could just sit in your carpet slippers feeling calm for the rest of your life."

She sounded almost wistful in Bill's behalf, outlining this programme. "It would be a change, I admit," Bill agreed. "It just isn't one I'm contemplating, that's all. I don't know why, but there it is. I guess I'm just not the marrying type, or something. Now in your own case——"

"And, anyway," said Connie, breaking into that, "I do like Frances. I guess you think I don't, from what you said a minute ago, but I do. I'd forgotten how

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amusing she is—and she's cuter than she used to be, don't you think? Love has improved her. It's kind of softened her around the edges. Well, but it always does."

"Is she in love?" Bill said, with surprised interest. "Old Fran?"

Connie merely looked at him.

"With whom?" he queried further. "How do you know? She's never even mentioned anyb——"

"With you, you ninny."

"What?"

"Oh, men!" Connie sighed. "The bright sex. The superior minds of the world. Deaf, dumb, blind, unconscious, nitwitted and bubble-headed. Frances is in love with you, I tell you."

"You're absolutely crazy."

"Didn't you honestly know it, at all?" Connie said. "I thought of course you knew it. Everybody else does. It's as plain as the nose on her face—

"Which is really quite plain," she concluded naughtily, "as noses go."

So that was one element in the general confusion now prevailing. Not that Bill ever believed in that one, or ever took it seriously, even for a minute. He didn't, and he never would. But if Connie believed in it, then it was important in his calculations—it supported his theory that she might be simply punishing him. He had too many different theories as to what was happening; and that was the whole trouble, here. There were too many possibilities. This could be revenge on Connie's part, or it could be a genuine affection for Julian—or, as seemed more likely, it could be a combination of the two. And then again, it might be just an act, and nothing more at all; it could be Connie's latest scheme

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for stirring up excitement in the home ; it could be one of those little marital earthquakes that she advocated—staged deliberately.

Or maybe not. It might be The Real Thing. You couldn't tell.

Whatever it was, she was loving every minute of it. That alone was clear. You should have seen that baby work, as Bill expressed it to himself sometimes. Life for three was just her dish, exactly. No one could possibly have guessed whether she had a preference for either of her men—she played no favourite, showed no slightest partiality. She smiled upon them both with equal radiance. She flirted with them both, amused them both, and took turns dancing with them. Once she insisted that they should both go with her to choose a hat, on the ground that it would never do for one of them not to like it. When the trio rode in cars or taxis, she sat cosily in the middle, linking arms on both sides, and even holding hands. " Mrs. Crowell," Bill said in mild remonstrance, when this first began, "—you go too far. Must you hold hands with my hated rival under my very nose ? "

But Connie said she must. " It's there or nowhere," she pointed out. " I'm never with him unless you're along, too—you know that. He wouldn't dream of inviting me to go anywhere without you."

Bill did know that ; and he nodded a little ruefully. " Yes. He fights fair," he said, " old Julian. I have to hand it to him."

" You sound as though you wished he wouldn't."

" Well, I do, in a way," Bill said. And in a way he did. The truth of the matter was that were moments nowadays when he achieved an actual nostalgia for the good old Cheever era—so simple and easy, compared to this. Your rival was really your enemy then, and

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the fight was a fight, and the hating was fine. Whereas in this grotesque new triangle, there was no enmity at all, and your rival was increasingly your pal and comrade and your great good friend. Sometimes it even seemed to Bill that they were ganging up against Connie—he and Julian—in a tacit but quite definite sort of way.

"I wish bigamy wasn't illegal," Connie remarked plaintively, one day towards the end of the second week of this new regime. "It would solve my whole problem. Then you and Julian could both be my husbands, and we could all three live in his penthouse, and I think we'd be very happy, don't you? Like Noel Coward and the Lunts in *Design for Living*. Except that I'd probably be neglected," she added pensively.

"You'd probably be what?"

"Neglected," she said. "You and Julian would get to talking politics, the way you did last night. Or was it baseball? Anyway, you both forgot all about me for hours."

"And a good thing, too," Bill said vigorously. "May it happen often. We felt fine, in fact. Personally, I haven't had such a light heart in a couple of weeks—and I'll bet Julian can say the same. Forgetting all about you was what did it, baby."

"That's kind of a backhanded compliment," Connie said, "but, still, I'll take it. No, but what I mean is, I've never seen such a beautiful friendship as you two've cooked up. You're like Damon and What-was-his-name—in the Bible, or Shakespeare, or wherever. You even look a little bit alike, did you know that? It's the funniest thing. I didn't realize it at first, but I've been noticing it more and more. The same type."

"Pretty soon you won't be able to tell us apart at all. And that will be just dandy," Bill said fractiously.

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"Oh, I'll have ways," she assured him. "I can always tell by ear. You'll always be the one who says things, and Julian will just be the one who laughs. He really laughs a little too much, don't you think? It's his only flaw. That, and not saying any very amusing things himself, ever. Poor Julian really isn't very original, is he? But I love him."

"You do, eh," Bill said. "Let's talk about that. I've been meaning to ask you for a late bulletin, dealing with that very point. The last I heard, you were fond of him, and sorry for him, and that was all. But now it's ripened into love, has it?"

"Well, kind of. In a small way."

"This is very interesting. Pray go on."

"I really mean it," she said. "I seem to have fallen a little in love with him. Not much, but a little bit. It's probably really nothing to amount to anything," she continued in a soothing tone, seeing Bill's expression. "In fact, I'm sure it isn't. Practically any other wife you might have wouldn't think it was even worth mention. But I do, because I'm so honest."

Bill was saying to himself, "Now, hold everything"; and he managed to speak fairly casually. "Well, well," he said. "This is news indeed. And do you think it will pass? Or don't you?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. In time."

"Or will it get worse, on the other hand? Just how much in love with him are you, do you think? More than you are with me, is that it?"

She looked shocked. "Oh, darling, no! Not more than I am with you. Only a little bit, I said."

"You can't very well be in love with two people, can you? Even a little bit?"

"Of course I can," said Connie. "Perfectly well.

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In fact, I am. That's the reason I say it's a pity I can't be married to you both at once."

"Um-hmm, it is," Bill said. "It's a crying shame. What a stuffy world we live in, to be sure! No bigamy, no nothing. It's hell on a girl, it certainly is."

"You're making fun of me," she complained. "If you won't be serious, I won't go on."

"Who isn't serious?" he snorted. "Who's talking stuff and nonsense here? If this isn't one of your pixie moods—with the poker face—I never saw it. Well, but all right. Have it your own way. If it's serious we're going to be, I can certainly do a good grim job. I've been in training for the past couple of weeks, as a matter of fact—not to mention the three months before that."

"Blip," said Connie.

"What?"

"I said, 'Blip.'"

"What the hell does that mean?"

"'Blip' is a word edgewise," Connie explained delightedly; and she added, "Don't you love it? I got it from a story about Mrs. Patrick Campbell. It seems she wanted to talk herself, and somebody else was monopolizing the conversation, so finally Mrs. Campb——"

The rest was lost, because he had reached over and muzzled her with his hand.

"All right," said Connie when the hand was removed, "but I just thought of it. And you bit."

"And now," said Bill, "could we get back to Topic A, if you're through telling little stories? I don't want to seem to rush you, but I'd really like to know what happens next. Since we agree that bigamy is out, and since you're in love with all concerned, what do we do about it? Where do we all

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three go from here? Don't tell me we just bump along the way we are."

"I suppose so. Yes."

"I don't," said Bill. "I just don't like it this way, somehow. There's got to be a change—and that right soon."

"There has?"

"There has."

"Oh, dear," said Connie. "There you go again. I was afraid of all this. You mean I've got to choose between you and Julian—just as I did between you and Ken, that time? Is that what you're saying?"

"Is it going to be so difficult?"

"Well, yes, it is," said Connie. "This time it is—and you know why. This is a very complicated, involved situation. And kind of delicate. If Julian were somebody you didn't like—if he were Ken, again, or somebody—I could just tell him to go away and forget all about me. And he even would, in time. But it's different with poor Julian, because he's so sweet and kind of pathetic, and you and I both adore him, and we can't just throw him out of our lives like that, all in one fell swoop. He hasn't done anything, after all, except be simply divine to us both. And it would break his heart. You know it would."

Bill thought, "Well. If it's his or mine——" But that would sound sticky, so he didn't say it. The situation surely wasn't as acute as all that, anyway.

This comforting conclusion was still in his mind when Connie's voice continued matter-of-factly, "And besides, sometimes I think I really will marry Julian eventually. I mean, before it's all over. I just don't know, Bill. Maybe I might."

Then once again he adjured himself to keep his shirt on; and he said, "I don't see why, exactly. Could

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you make it a little clearer? In view of the fact that you claim you still care more about me than ab——"

"I don't quite see why, either," she chimed in earnestly. "But I just have a fatalistic feeling about it. I have had, all along. I think he'll just make it turn out the way he wants it to turn out—just because it matters so much to him. More than it does to you."

"That's what you think."

"Oh, but it does," said Connie. "I'm new to him, and I'm old to you, and that's the difference. And for all Julian seems so gentle, he's pretty stubborn and dogged about things—you must have realized that. He nearly always get his own way. And maybe he will this time, is all I'm saying."

"Oh, that's all, is it?" Bill said. "And you're resigned to that, are you? Look, why don't you take a firm stand yourself? This isn't like you."

"I know. That's what worries me."

There was a short pause, during which he did some watchful worrying of his own, and discovered that nothing at all was to be learned from Connie's expression. She looked grave, and speculative, to match her voice.

"Of course," she observed finally, "Julian isn't you. But he's the next best person in the world, he really is. And all in all, I think he'd make a very good in-between husband."

"Repeat, please. A how's that?"

"You heard me," Connie said. "And you know very well what I mean. In between being married to you this time, and being married to you next time."

This was familiar ground indeed, and Bill was more

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relieved than otherwise to find himself back on it—although he concealed this fact, emitting a profane blast, followed by protracted sputterings.

"So here it is again, is it?" he said, in part. "It's that damn honeymoon theory of yours, rearing its ugly head again. Did I ever tell you what I really think of that theory, by the way? No, I never did—and I'm not going to now, except to say that I want no part of it. I think it stinks. I even think it's immoral. Don't get me started! Yes, and another thing—I don't mean to threaten you, but you may as well have the facts to go on. If you don't stay married to me this time, there just isn't going to *be* any next time—so don't count on it. What did you plan to do, anyway? Come wandering back to me in your old age? Well, not at all."

"Why, Bill," said Connie woebegonely. "You mean if I did, you wouldn't take me in? You'd just let me be all alone in the world—at an age like that?"

"Like what? Oh, hell's fire, skip it!" Bill roared. "I know how this goes. You get to talking double-talk, and pretty soon you get me doing it. But not this time. This time I've said my say, and I'm through with the subject. Think it over."

"How can I think it over when you're making so much noise?"

"You always have to have the last word, don't you?"

"Yes," said Connie.

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CHAPTER TEN

IT was at about this tide in the affairs of men and a lady that Bill and Julian lunched together one day, by appointment. Julian had suggested it, saying, "We can have a talk," and Bill had said, "Sure. Good idea. How's to-morrow for you?" They met at one o'clock in a skyscraper lunch club high over Wall Street. It was full of business men, with relatively nothing on their minds—just business. Bill and Julian, weighed with real cares, vetoed all ordinary tables, and finally procured and appropriately sequestered a small one, in a kind of alcove.

Well as they knew each other, and for all time as they'd spent in each other's company in the past two weeks, this would be the first real talk they had had alone together. Bill had even deemed it wise not to tell Connie they were going to have it. Now that it was about to begin, Julian seemed rather shy, and slow to speak; and even Bill became a man of few words temporarily; and so their first ten or fifteen minutes at the table were a little strained, with conversation either manufactured, or languishing. It was the sort of *tête-à-tête* wherein silences grew over long, and then both parties blurted out something or other simultaneously, and then both stopped, and each elaborately urged the other to go on. In the intervals of these explosions they ordered a double dry Martini apiece, which they knew to begin with would be followed by another double dry Martini apiece. Two were considered a lot at lunch-time in Wall Street—but never mind that. To-day was to-day.

There was a window beside them, and they could

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see the tops of other buildings and the mess of Brooklyn, and the bridge, and the jigsaw blue of the harbour, and Liberty Enlightening the World. They gazed out a good deal, at first, exhibiting a kind of rubberneck interest—craning and peering intently, in fact, at this familiar landscape. Bill even looked downward as far as he could, and thought of the sixty stories below him, and he said to himself morosely, " Civilization, well, the hell with it. This ought to be a cliff, and I ought to push old Julian off it, and go home. And here we sit, all safe and snug."

They had a good talk when they finally had it. Not that they were able to decide anything—they weren't —but it was a good talk, nevertheless. Old Julian poured his heart out, and it certainly proved to be an overflowing heart, brimful of love for Connie and loyalty to Bill and general grief and chaos. " I know just how you feel," Bill kept thinking, and " I'm in the same spot myself "—but Julian's spot was really worse, because he felt contrite in addition. He called himself an interloper in Bill's life, and a damned nuisance, and he even declared that he'd better go away somewhere and stay away. Take himself off. Get out of town. Move. Vanish from the picture.

This struck Bill as a happy thought, and a very handsome offer, and he was about to say, " Oh, no "—in the kind of voice that means, " Yes, do "—when it turned out that it wasn't an offer after all. It was just handsome. Julian did say further, " I suppose that's really the best plan all round, don't you ? " But even as he spoke he looked at Bill so piteously, imploring him with his eyes to deny the fact, that he had to deny it. He even had to urge old Julian not to think of such a thing. Because Connie had been right. You'd break his heart, and you couldn't do that.

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"There must be some other way we can work it out," Bill added soothingly.

It was funny how paternal you felt about old Julian. After all, he was thirty-eight. "Be your age, will you?" Bill thought; and he tried to think it with proper annoyance, but it was just no use. He succeeded only in thinking it gently. As usual.

"How about another cocktail?" one of them said at this point.

"Yes, how about it?" the other one said.

That made three, and still no lunch. No appetite, either, as far as that went. They had menu cards, and they fingered them listlessly, and Bill made a tent out of this. It was quite small. He put the saltcellar in the tent, on its side. It looked like a papoose, asleep.

"I've never been so hard hit in my life," Julian was saying lugubriously. "It happened the minute I saw her. I've never known anything like it."

"I have," Bill said, also lugubriously.

"Furthermore, it gets worse all the time."

Bill knew how that was, too.

"If you had been with her on the boat," said Julian, "I'd probably have kept my head a little better. I don't usually go about falling in love with people's wives. But by the time we landed, and I met you, it was too late, and I was gone. I tried to tell you then on the dock, remember?"

"I remember."

"You see, the thing is," Julian said, "no beautiful woman's husband is real till you meet him. That was my whole trouble. On the ship I knew, of course, that Connie was married, and happily married at that —she told me so, right away—in fact she talked about you a lot of the time. But I didn't want to believe in you, and I managed not to, till we landed. And then

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I didn't want to like you—not worth a damn—but look what happened there. I've never met a chap in my life I liked better, and that's the truth, Bill. That's what makes it so mixed up. It's frightfully bad luck for me, really."

"Well, and I'm in the same fix," Bill said. It was the first time he had said it aloud. "I mean—you're a good guy yourself, you know. The best."

They both cleared their throats then, in a sudden gruff duet. "Where the hell's that cocktail?" one of them said, just as the other was about to say it; and they shouted simultaneously, "Waiter!"

This sort of thing continued for an hour or more, and the Bill said, "Let's pick at a little food," so they did that. Meanwhile they talked on, never stopping, but their discussion of their problem followed the same lines from first to last, and they got nowhere with it. The more they said, the firmer grew the bond between them, that was all; and in the end Bill even found himself striving to cheer old Julian up by assuring him that his chances of winning Connie were really quite good. He was aware that this encouragement from a husband was unusual, and even perhaps madly rash, but nevertheless he felt impelled to it.

"She's very fond of you," he said. "She wants to marry both of us, it seems. She told me so herself, three days ago." This memory made him melancholy, even while it did cheer Julian up; and then the shoe was on the other foot, and Julian had to do the re-assuring. And so it went, by turns—with cries of, "Waiter!" interspersed at intervals. And all in all, it was no wonder they got nowhere.

"You see?" Bill said at last. "I could have told you in the first place. There isn't a thing in the world we can decide about this, or do about it—it's all entirely

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up to Connie, and the Lord knows what she'll do. She's working on it now, so I suppose we'll find out soon enough. Meanwhile the thing to do is brace ourselves. Drink up. I might even suggest that we get good and drunk. Right here and now."

"I'm already well on my way," Julian said candidly.

"I'm hot on your heels," Bill said. "That might even be my dust you see ahead."

"Wa-aiter!" they chanted again through the now nearly empty room.

"What time is it, do you suppose?"

"Who cares, do you suppose?"

It was three-twenty. Bill rang up the office, and there seemed to be nothing happening there, which was lucky. He said he wouldn't be in for the rest of the day. They had switched to Scotch and sodas with their lunch, and now they stuck to these, except for a slight touch of brandy to top off the meal. "Just a touch, though," Julian said piously. "I never mix my drinks, do you?"—and Bill said no, he didn't. Never had, and never would. Bad business, he concluded darkly.

"We agree, then."

"Sure we do. Agree on everything."

"Skol!"

"Skol!"

There was an hour of that. Another hour.

"Might as well do this every day," Julian remarked in the course of it. "I'm no use around my office these days, anyway, are you?"

"Not much."

"It's even affecting my bridge game," Julian said desolately.

They brooded over this, wagging their heads.

"It would serve her right if we both married somebody else," Bill said.

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"Who?"

"I don't know. Anybody. Frances."

"No. Let's not do that," said Julian, after a contemplative moment. He added politely, "Unless you want to?"

"No. I don't."

"Won't do, then. Settles that. Have to think of something else."

By half-past four they had achieved their aim, and they were tired of this place, anyway, and it seemed to them suddenly that it would be a good idea to go calling on Connie. This was Bill's proposal, and his corollary thought was even better—"Suitably clothed," he said. "If not in our right minds."

Julian glanced down at his costume, as though he feared it might turn out to be his underwear. "How do you mean?" he asked then, seeming relieved.

"Morning coats and striped trousers."

"Of course. And toppers. Let's go home and change."

They went first to Julian's house, where he changed, and where they had another Scotch-and-soda. This sharpened Bill's wits, and he suddenly said, "There's a fly in the apartment. I mean in the ointment."

"There is?"

"I just thought of it. How can I go home and change and then go home again? I'll already be there."

"You mean your clothes are there?"

"Um-hmm. They're there. That's where they are."

This seemed a serious dilemma, and they made a prolonged study of it, eyeing each other craftily the while. Then light dawned on Julian's countenance, and he exclaimed, "I know what! You can wear mine."

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"Can't either," Bill said definitely. He pointed at Julian. "You've got them on. Remember?"

"I mean my extra ones. I've got an extra outfit."

"You have?"

"Certainly have."

This revelation elated both of them, and Bill shook his head admiringly. "What a man!" he said. "A two-morning-coat man. I never heard of a man like that before. Amazing man."

"Last year's," said Julian modestly.

His valet found the extra outfit for them, and helped Bill into it. It did not fit as it might have; both coat and trousers were a little too tall and a little too thin for Bill; and the valet's Bond Street spirit was obviously dashed by this. He pinned Bill up with safety pins as best he could, but the trousers were still too long, they wrinkled at the ankles, and the valet knelt and fussed with the wrinkles for what seemed like quite a while. "He's getting them under control, though," Bill said to Julian, who strolled in to see. "Britannia rules the waves. What's that you've got in your hand, my friend?"

"L'il drink for you."

"You think of everything. Give it right here."

They were delighted with themselves in their twin costumes, while the thing was done. They stood before the wall of mirrors in Julian's dressing-room and looked at the effect, which—though a bit blurred—was impressive. You really never saw a more magnificent pair of men. They adjusted their hats at precisely the same angle, and were ready. "Come on," they kept saying to each other, while standing rooted to the spot. "Let's go."

It took them a long time to tear themselves away from their fascinating double image, but they made it finally, arm in arm.

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Julian's limousine was at the kerb downstairs, and they decided that the front seat was the place for them, so the chauffeur was ordered into the tonneau, and Julian drove, and Bill rode at his side. They sat up very straight, and their hats were tall, and they still felt splendid. "Two ushers in search of a wedding," Bill remarked as they bowled along. This reminded them that flowers were in order, and they stopped at a florist's, with a squeal of brakes. They would buy twin gardenias for their lapels, and twin bouquets to take to Connie.

At first they couldn't make up their minds about the twin bouquets, as to just what they wanted. It took thought, and conferences, and explorations. They barged about the flower-shop, through the fragrant aisles, sniffing at blossoms as they went, and knocking occasional vases over. Bill rather fancied a vast green shrub—a shrub in a tub, as he said: two of these—but Julian's conventional heart was set on two bouquets of orchids. Then Bill fell in love with a purple china dachshund with cacti planted in its open back, but Julian was horrified, and he even went so far in commonplaceness as to suggest red roses.

This would never do, and Bill upbraided him tenderly, and their salesman finally took them into a room-sized icebox where more blooms were kept. It felt fine in there, and furthermore it was like being on display in a glass showcase. They forgot their errand, and stood facing outward, bowing to customers; and they struck attitudes like store-window dummies, with elbows crooked. The salesman finally had to lead them out again. They were spoiling trade.

At long last they spied a bride's bouquet—white calla lilies, and white ribbon streamers. This struck them both as the one right and beautiful and fitting tribute.

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They would take a couple of those, they said in unison ; and they pointed firmly. Somewhere in the back of Bill's mind a bridegroom's memory stirred in a bothering way, and it drove him to introduce a low commercial note by adding, " How much are they ? " But Julian would not have it. Price was no object, he assured the salesman, who seemed pleased to hear it.

" But we haven't got two of them," the salesman said. " We can't even sell you this one—it's an order. We'll have to make the two up special for you." It would take a little time, he warned them ; but this was fair enough, and they assured him that they had all the time in the world. Oceans of time. They would repair to the bar round the corner, and wait patiently. And this they did. At six-fifteen the two bouquets, in cardboard coffins, were delivered.

They unwrapped them in the bar and left the boxes. Bearing a bouquet each, they made a sensational exit —they were even pelted with popcorn in lieu of rice on their way out—and this time they got into the tonneau of Julian's car, and let the chauffeur drive them to Bill's apartment house. Here it seemed a good plan to sneak upstairs in the service lift, via the service entrance. They did so, tiptoeing in through the kitchen like burglars—holding their forefingers against their lips in warning to the astonished cook. " Hist ! " Bill kept saying to her. He had always wanted to say " Hist ! "

They neglected to ask whether Connie was at home —somehow it didn't occur to them that she might not be—and their progress from the kitchen into the living-room by way of the back hall was fraught with the infinite peril of being heard. They negotiated it successfully, however, and entered the living-room in lock-step ; and the scene upon which they entered was charming, because Connie was reading to Pat. She

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had Pat on her lap, and both of them were intent on the book in Connie's hands, and Connie was reading rapturously, "And then WHAT do you think Jemima Puddleduck SAW?" It was at exactly this instant that old Julian knocked over a small but noisy table, and Connie and Pat looked up from the book and saw them. "It's Ix!" Pat cried in joyful welcome, and then added somewhat dubiously, "Two Ixes. Oh, no, one is Uncle Julian."

Connie seemed equally joyful, but she also seemed determined not to show it. The effort to keep from smiling pinkened her face, and puffed it slightly, and various little dimples seemed to jump in and out of her cheeks. "Pat, darling," she said hurriedly, "you go now and find Miss Oliphant and ask her to finish reading the book to you. Keep your finger in the page, so you won't lose your place. Run along, now, my sweet."

"No," said Pat, which wasn't like her. She was usually a most obedient child. But her father was beaming at her, with love unutterable, and, anyway, it was obvious that she liked the funny men. "I want to stay and look," she said.

"No, darling. Not this time," said Connie. "Because Mother has to talk business to Ix and Uncle Julian——

"Monkey business," she added sternly when Pat was gone. "Well, gentlemen? To what am I indebted for the pleasure of this visit?"

"We are drunk," said Julian, and they both nodded proudly.

"We are drunk, and we've come wooing," Bill supplemented. "Woo, woo, woo."

He never should have said that, as he found out ultimately. Never in the world. It suggested an outrageous new idea to Connie—or rather, it reminded her of an old one, in a new way.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE next day was a day for grim and drastic deeds. Bill even moved to a hotel, before that day was done. It all began with his hangover, which woke him cruelly early, banging in his head like an alarm clock set for six. The worst ones always did that, and this was such a monumental one that he groaned loudly and woke Connie, as he meant to.

"Rally the relatives round," he said from his pillow. "This is my death-bed, no fooling. Could the little widow go and get me one last aspirin—for auld lang syne?"

"You look terrible," said Connie cheerfully. She brought him aspirin and water. "No, only two," she said. "And now go back to sleep. It's the crack of dawn."

"Icebag," Bill said. "Bicarbonate. Is there an anæsthetician in the house? Listen, what kind of evening was that, to do a thing like this to me? What happened? Tell us of the night, for pity's sake."

"It was a night," she said. "Don't you really remember what happened? Well, when did memory fail? You tell me that, and I'll go on from there."

Bill closed his eyes, the better to concentrate. "We arrived with the bouquets," he said. "That seems to be the last. Oh, and you decided we needed black coffee, so you fed us that."

"And then I made you take cold showers, and little naps."

"And then we had dinner somewhere, didn't we? Or didn't we?"

"Yes," said Connie, "then we had dinner somewhere.

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And I thought that would sober you both up—but instead what happened? Instead you started on champagne and brandy mixed."

"Ouch," Bill said feebly, and he closed his eyes again. "Oh, yes, yes, yes. That explains a great deal. Just why did we do that, I wonder?"

"You tell me. The whole thing was a rebellion of some sort. You were both on strike against me, you said. You were going to picket up and down in front of my table. But then, in between saying things like that, you both kept begging me to marry you—or to marry the other one. I couldn't quite make out which. Well, and finally you both drank a standing toast to me—this was in the Piccadilly, and there were only about seven hundred people there at the time—and then you smashed the glasses by throwing them against the wall."

"Oh, my God. And then what?"

"Then, oddly enough, we were asked to leave."

"I trust this is the end of the story."

"It is. I finally got you both home after that."

"I'll have to sleep on this," Bill said, and forthwith fell asleep again.

His second wakening was at eight—his normal hour—and it was somewhat better. He might even live to see the office. What he felt now was less a hangover than a terrific grouch; and as he staggered out of bed and toiled about the room, hunting elusive garments, the grouch increased and all its causes, reasons, justifications, and even its dire intentions fell into focus and were plain. So he woke Connie up again. "Hey!" he shouted mercilessly, standing close beside her bed.

"Oh, please," she said. "This ceases to be funny. What do you want now—more aspirin? What time is it?"

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She pushed herself up on her elbows and peered at the clock and fell back on her face again.

"No, you don't," he said. "You're going to wake up and stay awake. I've got a few things to say to you this morning, my proud beauty."

"Later, my feathered friend," she said drowsily. But she sat up the next instant—in the very nick of time. Bill's hand had grabbed the covers at the top.

"And anyway, proud of what?" she continued conversationally, while grabbing them back. "I am not. I've never been so ashamed in my life. Imagine being hurled out of that restaurant with you two fools. Darling, shut the windows, will you, if I've got to sit here? And hand me that pink bedjacket—or that morning coat of Julian's," she added, spying it on a chair. "We all wear that in our family. We think we look quite dashing in it. Well, but go on—I'm listening. What were you going to say?"

"Plenty," Bill said tersely. "And you'd better listen harder than you're planning to. Speaking of rebellions, would you like to know what yesterday was really all about? Or can you guess? It was a plain case of two upright men being driven to drink—and by what, do you suppose?"

"By me?" Connie asked winsomely.

But he was not to be won. He paced the floor, delivering an excited monologue—getting his clothes on meanwhile, and gesticulating with successive items as they came to hand. "Don't wave your shirt at me," she said once. "You look too silly." Another time she remarked that men shouldn't try to make speeches in their pants and socks. "It just isn't impressive," she said musingly. "I don't know why. Or maybe it's the garters and the legs. Well. Anyway. Something."

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Heckled by these and other interruptions at intervals, Bill nevertheless fought the good fight—or the vociferous fight, at any rate. This was the showdown, he said. This was the day the worm turned. He would tolerate no more of Connie's vagaries, her indecisions, her shenanigans. He pointed out that it had now been four whole days since he had issued his final ultimatum on the subject of old Julian—and he would wait no longer, not another hour or quarter-hour, for her answer. He would have it now, and here. This very minute.

"You mean that, don't you?" Connie said resignedly, when he paused. "This time you mean it. Well—all right, then. I choose you, of course. Even with your hangover, and in your stocking feet and everything—even declaiming in your shirt-tails and nibbling aspirins and looking ghastly—I choose you. On account of how it seems that you're my man," she added, with another sigh. "And now that we've got that settled, let's have breakfast, please. I'm starving."

But Bill said, "Wait, now. Not so fast." He didn't feel like breakfast, anyway—and furthermore he was suspicious of a victory so easy. He stood scrutinizing Connie narrowly; searching with his eyes for signs of mental reservations. Discerning none, he said, "All right, you choose me—and that's fine. That's the kind of talk a husband likes to hear. Now all I want to know is, when are you going to tell old Julian?"

"To-morrow?" Connie said hopefully.

"What's the matter with to-day?"

"Oh, not to-day," said Connie. "To-day would be too brutal. Think how you feel yourself to-day—could you sustain a blow with that hangover? Well, his is probably just as bad as yours, or maybe worse. So

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it's only human kindness to wait till to-morrow. Or the next day."

"Or a week from Thursday," Bill said. "Or next year come Michaelmas. No. No, I don't like it. To-day's the day you're going to tell him, and that's flat. No more postponements."

"You'll be sorry," Connie said. "You'll miss him terribly yourself. You won't have anybody to get drunk and buy bouquets with, and come wooing. And I don't see why I have to be the one to tell him—why don't you tell him yourself? Why should the whole brunt of it fall on me?"

"Why not? Who brought him in?"

"Who brought Frances in?" said Connie. "You did. But when it comes to getting her out, I'll gladly help you, if you want me to. I'll even do it all. So I think you might do the same for me."

Bill didn't deign to answer that, except by an optical rebuke.

"Well, but all right," Connie said finally in a sad, submissive little voice. "I'll tell him to-day. I'll have lunch with him and tell him. Or no," she amended, thinking aloud, "lunch is too soon. I'll need more time to figure out what I'm going to say, and rehearse. I'll have him over this afternoon at cocktail time and tell him then. How's that?"

"That's okay—if you do it. All I ask is that you get it settled before I get home."

Nobody could say he didn't give her time enough and overtime. Although he left the office at four o'clock that afternoon, it wasn't until nearly seven that he reached Ninety-First Street. He had spent the interval in a midtown Turkish bath, quite profitably; and now he was looking and feeling almost fit again.

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He hoped not to need a clear head—but just in case he should, he had it.

Rounding the final street corner in the taxi, he looked up through the glass skylight towards his own apartment windows, and it occurred to him that—late though it was—Julian might still be up there. Better make sure, he said to himself; an encounter at this point was unthinkable; so he paid off his taxi at the corner and shut himself into a telephone booth, and called up Connie. She answered the phone herself, and he said, "Can you talk?"

"Why, yes," said Connie. "Fluently. Haven't you ever heard me? What shall we talk about? Darling, hello. Where are you, anyway?"

"I'm downstairs in the telephone-box at the moment."

"What doing?" said Connie. "Still pampering that hangover? Look, darling. Fight your way out of that, and come up here."

"Julian's gone, has he?"

"Um-hmm. He's gone."

"Or wasn't he there at all?" Bill demanded truculently, having thought that he detected a constrained note in her voice.

"Certainly he was here at all," said Connie. "He was here for an hour and a half. I promised I'd ask him here, didn't I? Well, and I did."

"And you told him what you were going to tell him?"

"Bill, it was terrific," she said dramatically. "In your whole life you've never—You can't imagine—Well, but anyway, I tried. I really made a magnificent effort. I even dressed for it—I wore the most unattractive thing I've got, those purple lounging pyjamas, and my hair that kind of fuzzy Haile Selassie way you hate. And a

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black lipstick. I really was a frightening sight, and it was deliberate. But Julian didn't even seem to notice," she added dejectedly.

"Well, anyway, so he arrived," she went on, as Bill maintained a chill silence. "And, of course, he was too pitiful for words—just as I knew he would be. Somehow his hangover seemed to bring out all that pathos and all that kind of wistfulness there is about him—and, furthermore, he was so pale he looked positively ethereal. I mean in a kind of greenish way. Well, so I mixed him quite a potent drink, for hair of the dog, and I thought, 'When he gets that down I'll tell him.' But he was a long time getting it down—I don't believe he felt very well. And in the meantime Pat came in, and the phone kept ringing, and there were lots of interruptions, and Julian kept apologizing about yesterday, and it was hectic. And then he and I got to talking about you, and how wonderful you are, and how we both love you—and in that way, the time just flew. And the first thing I knew it was six-thirty, and Julian had to go. He had to take a visiting aunt of his to dinner."

"And to make a long story short," Bill said, "you didn't tell him at all."

"Well, no," said Connie meekly, "not really at all."

"That's all I wanted to know," Bill said; and he hung up with a bang.

The question of what to do next had been settled by precedent; and he got into a taxi and said "Princeton Club" mechanically. He even got almost all the way down there before it occurred to him that it would be better to vary it—that Connie mustn't be allowed to think that this wasn't different from the Cheever separation, and far more serious. So he reversed his field and

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ordered the taxi to a hotel. It was the first one that came into his head, and the best one he could have thought of; the cuisine was good, the rooms were comfortable, and the reputation slightly rakish. He felt confident that Connie wouldn't like it.

He was bored in two minutes as soon as he had his room, having nothing to unpack, and no immediate plans whatever. He rang up Frances, but she was out; he might even have rung up old Julian, except for remembering that Connie had said that old Julian was squiring a visiting aunt. Finally he went alone to a movie. He was determined not to ring up Connie for several hours at least, but to let her worry in the meantime; and thanks to the movie it wasn't till after midnight that he did ring her up.

"I'm not here," said Connie's voice, in lieu of hello.

"I didn't expect you would be," Bill said. "You mean you're out celebrating, is that it? Well, will you give yourself a message when you come in, then? I just wanted to leave a forwarding address —so you can send my clothes and stuff down to me in the morning. I haven't anything here but a toothbrush and a comb."

"Where's 'here'?" said Connie. "That's the question. It isn't the Princeton Club—I know that."

"Oh, you phoned there, did you?" he said, smugly.

"Not at all," said Connie. "I went there. I rushed downstairs and followed your taxi in another taxi. In my pyjamas and all. It was really a thrilling race—the driver loved it. But he lost it. You must have turned crosstown without our seeing you. We went on down to the Princeton Club like lightning, and waited and waited."

This was pleasant news, but Bill said, "What made

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you so sure I'd go there again? Couldn't I have a new idea? As a matter of fact, I'm at the Hotel Athénée."

"Oh, you are!" Connie said. "I know about that hotel. That's one of those where they automatically send you a blonde with the bottle opener."

It wasn't really as bad as all that; but Bill let it go. "As you once pointed out," he said, "I'll have more freedom in a hotel. No house rules."

"You mean you're going to raise hell," said Connie. "Is this a threat?"

"It's practically a promise."

"Pooh!" she retorted. "You can't scare me. I'm mad at you, anyway. Good-bye."

But she didn't hang up.

"Good-bye yourself," Bill said, not hanging up either.

"I'll tell you why I'm mad at you," Connie said, after a pause, "—since it seems you're too proud to ask. The more I've thought this whole thing over, the more unjust it seems. Or injust? No. Un-. Because, I mean, here you demand that I put Julian out of my life—and not a word is said about your putting Frances out of *your* life. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the other goose, I should think. Or it ought to be. So I've decided I'm not going to do anything about Julian till you do something about her."

"Okay," Bill said. "Go ahead and use that as an excuse, if you want to. You know it doesn't hold water. How can I put Frances out of my life when she isn't in it?"

"You say she isn't," Connie said. "I'll bet you rang her up to-night, first thing. Now didn't you?"

"Well, yes, but ——"

"Look," said Connie. "I quote: 'That's all I

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wanted to know.' Unquote. And now I bang the receiver."

She banged the receiver.

He didn't see her for the next five days. He didn't even telephone her, though Connie—after a twenty-four hour lull—repeatedly telephoned him. Twice she rang up in the dead of night, and the first time this happened she said cheerfully, "Just checking up on you." The second time she said, "Are you alone?"

"Certainly not," Bill replied to that. "At four a.m. Do you take me for a hermit? The place is full of people, milling around."

"It just seems that way," Connie said soothingly. "It's because you're not sleeping well, these nights. You must have something on your conscience, like abandoning your wife or something. By the way, what's this I hear about you spending all your time up at Frances's apartment?"

"Who told you that?"

"My spies," said Connie. "Is it true?"

"Sure it's true," Bill said with gusto, feeling grateful to her spies. "Do you want to make something of it?"

"Why, no," she said. "There's nothing to be made. It's perfectly obvious on the face of it. I mean, I know you're only doing it to try to annoy me."

"I don't suppose you are annoyed, are you?" Bill inquired, "—by any stretch of the imagination?"

She ignored him. "And, anyway, that isn't what I rang you up about," she said. "I rang you about something really important. Look, Bill. The Andersons want to take our apartment."

"Now this," Bill said, "surpasses all. Did you actually wake me out of a sound sleep at four in the morning to

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talk real estate? Well, not a bit of it. Good-bye now. Time to hang up again."

He started to do so, and then had an afterthought. "Take it for how long?"

"I don't hear you," Connie said. "I've hung up myself. For a whole year, they said. That would mean until our lease expires."

"Furnished or unfurnished? What would they want to pay?"

"Look," she said. "You come and see me, and I'll tell you all about it. Come up to-morrow afternoon—I mean this afternoon—on your way from the office. Or I'm free for lunch."

"I'm not," he said.

"All right, you're not," said Connie. "You needn't sound so proud of yourself about it. Lots of people aren't free for lunch, but they don't go around boasting. Come up this afternoon, then. See if I care which."

"Listen, now," he said warily. "I'm not going up there on any wild-goose chase. If you haven't made up your mind on the point at issue—the real point, I mean——"

"You mean the sword's point," she interpolated helpfully.

"Right. Exactly. If you haven't come to any conclusion about that, I'm staying where I am. We can talk about the apartment matter on the phone."

"Well, but I have," said Connie. "And the apartment matter is part of it. The whole thing dovetails together, and it's all been solved in the most wonderful way. It's like Fate."

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CHAPTER TWELVE

SHE received him in a tempting-looking negligée, and a puff of perfume. There was also a new hair-do—a kind of careful disarray, or pretty confusion. There was a small blue velvet bow involved in it somewhere. She always dressed her scenes, and Bill said to himself, "I view with alarm——" And aloud he said, with a blank glance at the negligée, "Did you just get up?"

"What a husbandly remark!" said Connie. "No. Certainly not. It isn't that kind of a negligée—can't you see? It's the five-o'clock-in-the-afternoon, anything-may-happen kind. Supposed to be, I mean. Well, but anyway. Sit down."

He sat down, and she said, "Let me look at you. You're looking a little peeked."

"Never felt better in my life."

"People never say that when it's true," said Connie. "Well, but anyway."

"Where's Pat?" Bill asked, to change the subject.

"She'll be in soon. She's still out in the park. I told Miss Oliphant to keep her there till five-thirty, so I could talk to you."

"Talk away."

"I knew you'd be pleased about the Andersons wanting to take the apartment," Connie said. "You've always said it was too expensive, and wished we had it off our hands and could move to a smaller place. And as it is, the lease still has another year to run. I looked it up."

"It would help a lot," Bill admitted. "It's always been too much for me, as you say. But would you be

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willing to live in a smaller place yourself? I mean, of course—always providing we resolve our current difficulties?"

"Well, that's just it," she answered. "This is the way to resolve our current difficulties. The point is—Well, listen a minute, and I'll explain it all in full. It's a little complicated."

It was. It seemed that Connie's idea was not to sublet the apartment at all, but to remain in it herself for the year to come, while Bill took a smaller one and lived in it alone."

"What?" Bill said merely, to all that.

"You're not listening," she said impatiently. "Or else, if you are, you're not concentrating. How can I make it any clearer than I have."

"Look," Bill said. "Let's start back at the beginning—at A for Anderson. They wanted to take the apartment. That's what you said, isn't it? And after all that build-up about them, it seems you don't want to let the apartment, to them or anyone else. You want to live in it yourself for the next year, till the lease expires. So what have the Andersons got to do with it? What are they in this for?"

"They're not," said Connie. "They haven't got anything to do with it, except——"

"Well, then, let's eliminate them, for God's sweet sake. There's confusion enough. Reason totters, as it is."

"It was just that they gave me the idea," said Connie. "They made me lease-minded, you might say. I mean I wouldn't have dreamed of reading all that fine print, if it hadn't been for the Andersons. And so I wouldn't have had my fine idea, don't you see? They were what brought it on. That, and what you said the other day about common wooing."

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"About—— Oh! So that's in this, too. Well, go on. Get to the fine idea."

"You sit down again, and I will."

"I think I'd better take it standing up."

"Oh, it isn't that bad," Connie said. "It isn't a divorce—it's just a trial separation. Let's all three live apart for a while, you and Julian and I, the way we've been doing this past week—and that'll give you and Julian an even chance, don't you see? It's only fair to you both. And, moreover, it's only fair to Frances. That way, everybody'll be able to see everybody in perspective, and by-and-by everybody'll know who everybody wants to be married to."

"Sounds as though there were dozens of us," Bill said distractedly. "You know damn well everybody knows right now who everybody wants to be married to—except you yourself. We can skip Frances, she doesn't want to be married to anybody. She's the smart one. That leaves Julian and me—and the idea is that we both come wooing you, is that it? And from afar. From equidistant points."

"That's it exactly," Connie said enthusiastically.

"We press our suit, as the saying is," Bill said. "His fine new English suit, and my old threadbare one. I see. And it's every man for himself, and may the best man win, and all that."

"Yes."

"And that's what you want me to do, is it?"

"That's what I've got to do," said Connie. "I can't make up my mind in a hurry. It's too important. And I can't decide anything while I'm living with you, anyway. It isn't fair, as I said. In some ways it gives you too much of an advantage over Julian—and then in other ways it gives *him* the advantage, don't you understand that? Because it means that I see you any old

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way, and I only see him at his best. Whereas, if *neither* of you lived with me, I'd always see *both* of you at your best, don't you see? And then I could decide which I like best."

"Long ago I gave up trying to argue with that mind of yours," Bill said. "It's too—it's—I don't know. Too cock-eyed for me. Too feminine, or something. I suppose all this crazy reasoning makes sense to you, doesn't it? It must. So it doesn't matter whether it makes any sense to me or not."

"That's right," Connie said gently. "It really doesn't, Bill. It's my own problem—and I have to solve it my own way. And this is it."

After a pause she went on: "You've got to let me at least try it, anyhow."

So we come to the era with which this troubled history began, when Bill moved into his bachelor apartment, and Connie fixed it up for him. Bill had just thought he'd stay on at the hotel because surely it wouldn't be long before she made up her mind one way or the other; but Connie said she wouldn't be rushed, and it might take her six months or a year, and in the meantime he must have a nice little home of his own. That was when Bill began to see that it might be for ever. In his heart, he never really believed a word of it before.

Connie went apartment-hunting with him—armed with one of those lists agents make out: "Address—Apt. No.—No. of Rooms—No. of Baths—Rent—Remarks." Twice in one day she called him up excitedly to say that she had found the very place, and he must come right here to this address—and once he did (the other place was too expensive) and found a mad modernistic penthouse with a lady in a hat in it, showing it off.

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"But I thought the terrace would be so nice for us in summer," Connie said. "Who's 'us'?" Bill demanded hostilely. "Not this summer. Nice for me, you mean."

"Aren't you even going to ask me up to see you?"

"Probably not."

"Oh, well, in that case," Connie said, "I'd rather you didn't have a terrace. A man with no wife to guide him might get in trouble, with a terrace."

"He might even throw himself off it."

Connie nodded efficiently, and a minute later Bill saw her murmuring to the lady in the hat, who was looking profoundly horrified. And two minutes later they were being eased out.

"Now what the hell!" Bill said in the elevator. "What changed her mind so fast? What did you tell her?"

"Well, she asked me," Connie said.

"Asked you what?"

"How many there were in the family," Connie said. "So I told her there were only you and your keeper and your nurse, that was all. Oh, and your rabbits. Your *flocks* of rabbits."

"Ah," Bill said.

Finally, Connie found the very place in the East Sixties; and Bill went with her to look at it, and agreed that it would suit him well. It was near the underground, which he could take direct to Wall Street; there was a restaurant next door which would send up meals if he wanted them there. He could get his own breakfasts in the kitchenette, or eat them from a high stool at the drug store on the corner. The building had a communal roof used by all the inhabitants, where he

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could take the sunbaths for which he had a predilection ; and there was a little self-operating lift for people who weren't afraid of it.

" Will you get a decorator ? " Connie said. " Or will you let me see what I can do ? " She looked wistful and eager, and she said, " Oh, let me. I'd love to, and I know how you like things, and I'll be good. And it will be a job for me, and it'll keep me out of trouble."

" Nothing keeps you out of trouble, baby."

" How you talk ! Things often do."

It was two or three weeks before he could move in. Paint had to dry, curtains had to be made, a chair or two had to be re-upholstered—the place had been what was known as " semi-furnished "—and a few new things had to be bought. Connie began by consulting him, running into his office at odd hours with swatches of material spouting like fountains from her hand ; but he always said, " Whatever you think," so finally she suggested that she do it all herself and let it be a surprise for him when it was finished.

" All right," he said. " But no tricks, now. No gags."

" Why, Bill ! As if I would."

And she didn't. The place was charming. There was a white-walled room and a blue one and a yellow kitchen with brown checked-gingham curtains. The décor was more or less modern ; Bill when he sat down was built for modern chairs. She had found a place for all his favourite household gods—the fish he had caught off Nassau, that damn sailfish, Connie had always called it ; his crew oar ; his club beer-mug ; his sun lamp ; his pictures of teams and of Pat, and his framed diploma from Princeton—all the things from his study at the other apartment.

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It had all happened pretty fast, and it was a day or two before he really came to. Then he took counsel with himself, during one long solitary evening of floor-pacing and over-smoking and sitting sunk on his spine in chairs. He was supposed to pursue his own wife, and the more he thought about it the more outraged he became ; and he would be damned if he was going to do it. Either she'd come back to him of her own accord, or she wouldn't come back at all. As for himself, he wasn't going to lift a finger.

He took this up with Frances, who said, " Now you're talking ! "

" Yeah ! " Bill said wretchedly. " Now I'm talking. But can I do it ? "

Frances looked at him, and snorted. " You men in love," she said. " You're hopeless." And she added, " Why don't you get a girl ? "

" I don't want a girl."

" I think you're making a mistake," said Frances. " That's the way to do it—it's the good old tried-and-true movie-plot way. You make her jealous, and she'll eat out of your hand. It always seems to work."

" She says she's jealous of you," Bill said. " But she isn't eating out of my hand. Not noticeably."

" The trouble is, I'm not the type," Frances said. " I'm just good old Fran, a great old horse. You ought to know that, if anybody does. I could be found creeping out of a gentleman's bedroom at a Long Island house-party at four in the morning, and everybody'd just take it for granted I'd been putting cold compresses on his head."

" Why, not at all," Bill said politely.

" Certainly," said Frances. " Don't try to be courtly with me. Well, but to get back to Connie—I'll buy myself some coquettish hats, and a naked evening dress

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or two, and we can try a little harder to annoy her, if you like. That is, if you think you can stand it."

"I think it would be damn swell of you," Bill said. "Only—well, do you want to be bothered?"

Frances looked off across the restaurant. "Why not?" she said.

So he kept on seeing Frances. He didn't see Connie herself for two weeks after he moved. He thought the thing to do was to keep away, and, anyhow, he was feeling so wretched that he was afraid he'd show it if he saw her. So he did nothing. Even when Connie rang up his office in his absence and left messages for him to ring her back, he didn't do it. Finally, she reached him at the apartment.

"What's the matter? Where have you been?"

"Right here. Nothing's the matter. Why?"

"You're supposed to be wooing me," Connie said reproachfully. "And I haven't heard from you since you began. That's not the way to begin a wooing, and I'm disappointed in you."

"How's Julian?" Bill said grimly.

"Very well, thank you."

"You're welcome."

"What?"

"Nothing. He's doing all right, I take it. At the wooing, I mean."

"Oh, beautifully."

"Then you haven't any problem," Bill said. "The best wooer wins, in this league. Wasn't that the arrangement?"

"The 'better wooer,'" Connie said. "Mind your grammar, darling. Anyway, that's not the way to look at it. How can I tell who the better wooer is? You're not even trying."

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"And I'm not going to."

But he did send her something the next day. It was a beautifully arranged and perfectly enormous bouquet of vegetables—little carrots, little radishes, all marvellously blended, and tied up with yards of satin ribbon (Julian had the corner on flowers and candy and perfume so it had to be something else). It was surprising how beautiful it looked.

That night at six-thirty he was dressing or beginning to when his doorbell rang, and it was Connie in the vestibule downstairs. Her voice came faintly up to him through the speaking-tube.

"I haven't got a key," she said, as if she ought to have one.

She came up. She was wearing some of his carrots, pinned to her shoulder. They were very becoming. She touched them lightly with her fingers and said, "Darling, how sweet of you."

"I thought you'd like them."

"I adore them," Connie said. "I nibble one whenever I'm hungry. Well, how are you? And how's life? Are you having fun being a bachelor?"

"Oh, terrific," Bill said. "Such goings on. Don't open any doors without knocking, will you?"

"I'll shoot through the panels," Connie said, "with my little forty-four. Remember the 'Frankie and Johnny' song?"

"No. Do you?"

"No," she agreed.

She wandered about the apartment, touching things, arranging things, plumping up sofa cushions, adjusting curtains, running her finger over the mantelpiece to see if there was dust.

"How's Pat?" Bill said.

"Oh, too cunning for words."

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He wanted to ask if Pat missed him, but he didn't.

"She said the cutest thing yesterday," said Connie. "I must tell you. I've been dying to tell somebody—and, after all, you're the only one I *can* tell." She had a rule against repeating the bright sayings of her child to anyone on earth except its father.

"Shoot," said Bill. "What was it?"

"I was taking her to the doctor's——"

"What for?"

"Just for a check-up. She's perfectly all right. Well, and it was raining when we came out of the house, so Pat said, 'Shall we go by taxi or shall we go by umbrella?'"

"That's marvellous," Bill said. He grinned immoderately. It made his face ache, somehow, and his heart ached, and he wanted to cry.

"Listen, now," he said to Connie. "Don't settle down. You've got to get out of here."

"Why have I?"

"Because I've got to dress."

"I won't ask you where you're going," said Connie in a pious voice.

"You'd better not."

"I'll only peek at your engagement pad, and see."

She did so, calmly. It was lying open on the little table by the telephone.

"Fooled you," said Bill, when she had had a look. There was nothing written down for to-night at all.

"Oh, well, in that case," Connie said, "there's really no hurry about your dressing. So why shouldn't I settle down? I think I will, and see what develops."

"I think you won't," Bill said firmly.

He advanced upon her, and pulled her up by the

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hands, and kept hold of them. Then he locked both wrists in the grip of his own right hand, and with his left he picked up her gloves and bag from the couch, and hung the bag by its suede handle from one of her arms, and tucked the gloves into her pocket. "Out you go," he said, and propelled her towards the door, against good stiff resistance. "Men are such bullies," said Connie, as she went. "In fact there really are times when I dislike men intensely."

"Now *there's* a novel discovery! When did you first notice this?"

They had reached the door by this time, and Connie clung to the jamb and tried hard not to budge. "This is as far as I go," she declared optimistically.

In the end he picked her up and carried her down the several flights of stairs, and opened the front door . . . and then hastily closed it again, having deposited her in the vestibule. He waited inside for a moment, listening—expecting a pounding of Connie's fists, or a frantic ringing of all eight doorbells, or at least a verbal protest of some sort. There wasn't a sound, however, and finally he called out tentatively, "Go on home."

"All right, I will in a minute," said Connie, sounding preoccupied. "I haven't quite finished."

"Finished what?"

"Reading your mail."

"Very dull mail," she added matter-of-factly, as Bill yanked the door open again.

He grabbed the torn envelopes and the unfolded letters, glowering fiercely. "Damn it," he said, "you stop at nothing. What's the big idea? You never used to read my mail when you were my lawful wife. Or did you?"

"Well, but it's different nowadays," she said. "I have to keep tabs on you somehow. . . ."

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This time he escorted her all the way out to the kerb and put her into a taxi and gave the driver her address. "Well, good-bye, be good," said Connie, rolling the window down. "And remember—if you should happen to find yourself locked out, come on up to my house. I'll give you some dinner."

"What makes you think I'm going to—— Hey!" Bill said. "Hey, wait!"

The taxi was wheeling away from the kerb, and Connie's face in the window was grinning impishly. "Go on, don't stop," she said to the driver; and to Bill—who was wildly exploring his pockets—she shouted back: "Is this what you're looking for?" And it was, of course. She had stolen his key.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IN the months that followed, Bill kept saying to himself, "Look, now, Crowell. You've got to get over this woman." He put effort into it, and his attempts were various. They ranged all the way from not seeing Connie to seeing so many other girls that all the other girls' faces blurred together—so what good was it? Frances came in for a large share of attention, and she was definitely a help, but she was no answer.

Specifically those months were June and July and August; and that was the summer that Connie spent in New York—for reasons best known to herself. "Why?" Bill asked her, several times. "You never did before." But Connie's explanations were vague, and they differed

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every time—she just wanted to see what it was like ; she was having too much fun to leave ; she was too lazy to go shopping for resort clothes in this weather ; and, anyway, it wasn't really hot. Once she gave a reason in two words—" unfinished business "—and Bill said, " Meaning, Julian ? " and Connie said, " No. Meaning you." Whatever that meant.

He was staying away from her as much as he could. He was really doing extremely well, considering how he felt about it. He missed her terribly ; and he hated the life he lived alone. Good qualities of hers that he had never especially noticed before—that he had just taken for granted—kept rising in his mind and seeming impressive, in a way they never had. She was so gay about everything—so seemingly light and vague and casual about everything—you wouldn't think she would be a good housekeeper, for instance ; but she was. He realized now how smoothly she had oiled all the wheels of living ; how delectable the meals had always been, and how content the servants. You could say to yourself that these things were accidental—but you didn't believe it. Or you could say to yourself that the servants humoured her because she was a child ; and maybe it was true. The fact remained that she got results, far above and beyond the average.

She did well with Pat, too. There was no questioning that. If Pat regarded her as a kind of amusing older sister, it made no difference—she had a kind of sweet but firm and completely effective discipline. Bill thought of the other houses he'd been to, and the crisp, efficient, grown-up wives and mothers who were in them—they had Theories, and they Did Things, and they Knew How to Bring Up Their Children. The fact remained —and nothing could gainsay the fact—that Pat was the best-behaved child he knew, even as the household was

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somehow the smoothest-running household. It was amazing, and he had never thought of it before; but there it was.

Julian, meanwhile, was having troubles of his own; and he brought them all straight to Bill. In the beginning, when the Crowells first separated, Julian had been terribly upset, feeling himself responsible; but it had been a point of pride with both Bill and Connie to convince him that this was not the case—that it would have happened to them anyway. It had been coming on, they told him, for a long time now. Even her trip abroad had been a part of it.

Thus reassured, he felt free to pursue his own courtship, and even to discuss it with Bill and ask his advice about it. "What on earth do you do with her?" he said despairingly. Questions like that.

"What's she up to now?"

Julian seemed not to know where to start, having too much to say. "Well, for one thing," he said, "I thought there were only two of us in this. I mean, I thought all the rivalry was strictly between you and me. But the greatest lot of chaps you ever saw have suddenly turned up, and they're around there all the time in the afternoons, having cocktails with her. Their names——"

"I know," said Bill. "Their very names. I know just what you mean. Doggo and Rollo and Itchy and Bake—and Half-Bake, if I may say so. And the poet. Have you seen the poet yet? And have you heard him?"

"Oh, so you know them all!"

"Like my blood brothers," Bill said. "They're not new. I've known them all for centuries."

"And you haven't objected?" Julian said reproach-

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fully. His tone suggested that Bill should have paved the way for him better than this.

"I didn't mind them," Bill said. "Not usually. And, anyway," he added, eyeing the other speculatively, "have you ever tried objecting to anything Connie does?"

"Well, no, I can't say I have. Not yet, at least. And not aloud."

"You ought to try it some time. It's quite an experience."

"You don't sound very encouraging. You mean it doesn't work out?"

"I wouldn't quite put it that way," Bill said judiciously. "Let's say, rather, that it works out—but seldom in the way you think it's going to. She's a very unexpected girl, most of the time. You must have realized that."

It was pathetic to see the guy hanging on his words so avidly. At any minute you expected him to take out a pencil and paper and begin jotting notes. "And here I am," Bill thought, "playing the game for my rival." There really seemed to be no end to the absurd situations Connie could create.

Aloud he said, "I'm a fine one to advise you. Case of blind leading the blind. But let me give you one little tip—in the first place, never be surprised by anything she says or does. In the second place, don't try to out-think her, or outwit her, or whatever you want to call it—because you can't do it. And never try to manage her—or at least never let her know you're trying. You have to give her her own way, up to a certain point—and after that——"

"After that, what?"

"After that she gets it, anyhow," Bill said morosely. "And there you are."

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All of which brought them to the month of September, and to the memorable day when Connie appeared at Bill's apartment and said vigorously, "Look, now. This has got to stop. I'm tired of this."

"This what?" Bill asked.

"This trial separation. It isn't working out the way I wanted it to, at all. It's all Julian and no you. And you're liking it too well, or something. In fact you love it, or at least you seem to. So there's only one thing left for me to do, I guess—and that's get a divorce."

She stopped, and looked at Bill with intense interest. You would have thought that she had delivered a thunderbolt, from her expression. But Bill merely said, "So it's come."

"You act as though you expected it."

"Of course I expected it."

"Well, I didn't. I'm being forced into it. By you."

"I don't see how you figure that."

"Well, you've been neglecting me, haven't you? You've been practically boycotting me! You haven't made any attempt at all to win me back, or—or anything. Now, have you?"

"See here," Bill said indignantly. "You can't shove this thing off on me. After all, you've always wanted a divorce—the way a kid wants a new toy." This struck him as being one of the truest things he had ever said, and he continued thinking aloud in this vein, while she watched his face with a look of growing consternation. It was perhaps unfortunate that he was too absorbed to notice it.

"It's a funny thing," he was saying thoughtfully. "Some wives want security, and some want diamond bracelets—but you're a wife who has really always wanted a divorce more than anything. Haven't you? You've wanted a divorce the way a chorus girl wants

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a mink coat. Well, all right—so I guess the time has come. So all I can say is, all right, go ahead and get it."

"That's not what you're supposed to say, at all," Connie said desolately.

"What am I supposed to say, then?"

"Aren't you even going to protest a little? Don't you even care?"

"What good would it do me if I did? I've protested for years—and I've cared like hell for years—and where has it got me? Right back into bachelor's quarters, where I started from."

"If I do get a divorce, I'll marry Julian," Connie said threateningly; but if she considered this the playing of her trump-card, it didn't work with Bill. "Yes," he said, "I take it for granted you will."

"And you don't even mind?"

"I'm past minding anything, baby. Much. And it's lucky for me I am."

"But you can't just let this happen like this!"

"What else am I supposed to do?"

"Well, something! Where's your ingenuity? When we were married you would have thought of something —but now that we're threatened with divorce, you don't. I thought you would. After all, it's your marriage you're breaking up—and you just sit there."

"My God, how do you do it? You're unbelievable." He slumped back in his chair and shook his head. "No, it'll be a relief. You get your divorce and marry Julian."

"All right, damn you," Connie said with tears in her eyes. "I will."

She did get her divorce, but she was slow about it. One might almost have said she was stalling. September was too early for Florida, she said; and October was the best month of the whole year in New York; and

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in November there were the big football games she didn't want to miss. It wasn't until after Thanksgiving that she departed, finally.

Julian could have gone with her, to keep her company, but he complained to Bill that she wouldn't let him. They had lunch again. "I thought I'd go down to Palm Beach, too," Julian said moodily, "and take a house for myself, and be near Connie while she's there. But she won't have it. She says it wouldn't be fair for me to be there with her unless you are, and that if I want to come down even for a week-end while she's there, I've got to bring you—or persuade you to come with me, rather."

"That'll be cosy," Bill said. "That would be fine, wouldn't it? Well—sorry to do you out of these happy little week-ends—but I won't be able to do it. Can't leave the office—and that's the least of my reasons."

"Well, I don't blame you," Julian said resignedly. "I was afraid you'd feel that way. Well, so I guess we're both stuck here."

"Looks like it."

"We must see a lot of each other," Julian said. "Misery loves company."

Bill thought, "It's choosey about it, though. I'm getting a little fed up with you, fellow." And he was.

They were both going to see Connie off on the train from Penn Station. She was travelling down alone, although Pat and Miss Oliphant and the domestic staff were to follow presently—with Frances shepherding them. Connie was planning to take a house for her three-months' sojourn in Palm Beach, and she had invited Frances to come down for the duration as her guest, companion and general manager. "It will give her a nice holiday," Connie had explained to Bill, "and

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a nice job. Don't you really think it's very philanthropic of me ? "

She smiled slyly at him, and Bill said, " Well, isn't it ? "

" Certainly not," said Connie. " It couldn't be less so, actually. You didn't really think I'd leave her in town with you in town ? "

So away she went. Bill and Julian met at her apartment to take her to the train, and Connie made quite a little ceremony of it, serving champagne and clicking glasses with all concerned. She had vast quantities of luggage along, and Julian remarked anxiously that it looked as though she meant to stay away for ever, but she said that it was just that she had bought quite a trousseau to get a divorce in, and that the luggage wasn't really anything but a lot of hope chests, you might say.

In Julian's car on the way from the apartment to the station, Bill was morose, but tried not to be—and Julian was rather gay, but tried not to be. They arrived early and the train wasn't made up, so they stood at the top of the steps waiting for the gates to open. Baggage hemmed them in like the wall of China, with the porters for guards. " Now you behave," Connie kept saying to both of them. " Bill, you look after Julian, and don't let him get into trouble. And vice versa. I shouldn't be leaving you both alone," she added anxiously.

The crowd gathered, and Bill looked them over in the intervals, and there was a beautiful young man going down, and he said to himself, " Oh-oh," and glanced at Connie to see if she had noticed. She had. She caught his glance, and nodded brightly at him, and Bill said to her, " Trust you." And all of this went past Julian, and was completely unnoticed by him.

" Brother," Bill thought, " you've got a lot to learn."

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She was a great girl for telegrams, and Bill got several loquacious ones from her in the next twenty-four hours, sent from various stations on the way down. He was surprised to discover later that Julian had received only one—a relatively short one, announcing her safe arrival.

And things continued in this ratio in the ensuing days and weeks. While Julian complained to Bill of her infrequent communications, Bill himself continued to hear from her very often, in one way or another. She telephoned him, wrote him letters, sent him live turtles with messages carved on their backs, and such other indigenous gifts as a snake-skin necktie—with belt to match—and a lamp made of an embalmed baby alligator sitting on its haunches, with the light bulb in its gaping mouth and a brass ashtray in its two front paws. . . .

Connie was still Connie, in a word.

This type of thing continued until late in February. As the day of her actual divorce trial approached, she telephoned Bill to tell him that he had simply got to come down and see her through it—she couldn't go through an ordeal like that without him.

"Now, listen," Bill said. "Talk sense, will you? Must I witness my own execution? Is this sadism on your part—or what? I'm going to spend that day right here in New York, and if anybody wants to find me tell 'em I'll be that weeping drunk at the corner table in Bleeck's bar on Fortieth Street. If you need somebody to help you through the ordeal, what's the matter with Julian?"

"He wouldn't be any use."

"It's a nice time to find that out."

"I think you're mean," said Connie. "I've a good mind to set my lawyer on you. Or I ought to tell the minister who married us how you're behaving. You

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promised him you'd love and honour and cherish me—as long as we both should live—and now look at you! You won't even help me through my divorce. If I were going to have my appendix out, or a wisdom tooth pulled, or something, you'd stand by me, wouldn't you? Well, why is this so different? In lots of ways it hurts just as much."

"Then don't do it," Bill said involuntarily.

"What did you say? This isn't a very clear line."

"I said I know exactly how you feel."

"Well, then, come on down," said Connie. "Aw, come on! I'd do it for you." She paused, and when she spoke again her voice was meditative. "It really wouldn't be wise of you not to come," she said, "—because who can tell? Maybe I'll marry you on the courthouse steps as soon as it's over, the way they so often do. You'd really better be around, in case I want to."

"That settles it," Bill said. "I wouldn't risk that for the crown jewels. I'll stay right here."

He stayed right there. The day of the divorce came, and even the hour of it; and he spent that hour staring glumly out of the office windows, and walking aimlessly around, and neglecting to reply when spoken to. . . . In due time, and even more promptly than he had expected, a telegram came from Connie, saying, "OOPS NOW I'VE DONE IT." Simply that. Somehow it sounded—for Connie—a little subdued, and even a little scared.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SHE came home the next day by plane, and Julian met her at the airport. He tried to get Bill to go with him, but Bill felt that it wasn't suitable. They had quite a discussion about it. "After all," Bill said, "she's now my divorced wife, and things can't go on just as though nothing had happened. They've got to begin to be different—and to-day's the day. Got to start somewhere."

The result of his not having gone was that Connie and Julian showed up at his apartment, Connie having insisted on coming there direct from the plane. Her luggage was still in Julian's car downstairs. She kissed Bill on the lips, briefly but soundly, and cried at once in an injured voice, "Darling, the idea of not meeting me! And I thought you'd be so glad to see me after three whole months."

"Well, and I am."

Divorce agreed with her, there was no question about that. She looked radiant. Julian, on the contrary, looked positively funereal; and he said nothing. "Julian and I have had a slight but unmistakable tiff," she explained cheerfully. "He's mad at me because my lawyer came up on the plane with me, and is at the Ritz. We just dropped him there on our way here."

"Young lawyer?" Bill inquired.

"No," said Connie, while Julian grunted "Yes."

"Well, youngish," Connie temporized. "And kind of pretty. Blue eyes and a sunburn. Julian doesn't like him.

"Well, how are you?" she continued to Bill, without

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pausing. "You're a grass widower, do you realize it? It's a horrid phrase, I think. But probably a blissful state. How do you feel? Any different? By the way, Frances sends her love."

"Did you leave her down there?" Bill said. "Or is she coming by train with Pat, or what?"

"I don't like your being so interested," Connie said. "I don't think I'll tell you. Well, yes, I will too. She's staying down there a while longer—till I see."

"See what?"

"Just see," said Connie.

There was trouble in no time, after she got back; and it was Julian's trouble. Within a fortnight of her return he was saying to Bill, "I need your advice again. Tell me what you'd do in a case like this?" . . .

It seemed that now that Connie had her divorce she was suddenly strangely reluctant to name her wedding day. "I can't pin her down," said Julian. "Sometimes I think she hasn't any intention of marrying me till—well, God knows when. She says she meant to, but that now she finds she's enjoying the feeling of being a divorcée, and that it's only natural she should."

"Um-hmm," Bill said. "I can imagine."

"She's using all sorts of excuses," Julian said. "Her apartment—the fact that the lease on her apartment hasn't run out yet. I suggested that she should sublet it, but she said, no, she wouldn't, she didn't like to think of anybody else living there. 'It was Bill's and my apartment,' she said, 'and I'm sentimental about it.' So then I suggested that I should take her lease over, and we both live there, but she wouldn't hear of that. She said it was your apartment really, and she couldn't live in it with me, and that was that. On the other hand, she won't move, so what am I going to do?"

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"Well, now let's think," Bill said, without in the least expecting to be able to.

"And she even had some new cards made," Julian was continuing dolefully. "Calling cards. They have her divorcée's name on them—you know, using her maiden surname as a first name, the way they do. Mrs. Gregory Crowell."

"'Mrs. Gregory Crowell,'" Bill echoed. It didn't sound like anyone he knew.

"I pointed out to her," said Julian, "that it was hardly worth while having those made if her name was going to be Mrs. Julian Lambert in a week or two—but nevertheless she did. Sometimes I think she doesn't mean to marry me at all."

"Oh, now, buck up," Bill said. "Of course she does. That's why she's got her divorce, isn't it?"

"Sometimes I wonder," Julian said.

This situation threatened to get worse before it got better, and Julian kept coming with new complaints, and at last he said, "I wish you'd talk to her." So Bill did talk to her.

"Look, now," he said. "What goes on here? What are you trying to do to the poor guy—push him around?"

"Who—Julian? Why, Bill, of course not? Why do you say that?"

"You've got him in an awful state," Bill said. "He's got the screaming meemies because he thinks now you're divorced, you just want to stay a divorcée, and you're in no hurry to marry him. At least that's what he tells me."

"Well, he's right, in a way," Connie said. "I've got the rest of my life to marry him, whereas I've only got this little while to be a divorcée. And I kind of

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like it. He's just got to be patient, that's all there is to that."

But apparently there was a showdown the next time she saw Julian, for she rang up Bill in another twenty-four hours and said mournfully, "Well, it's all settled."

"What is?"

"Julian's and my wedding day. We've finally picked the twentieth of this month."

"As soon as that?" Bill said, in spite of himself.

"Why, Bill! Only yesterday you were trying to goad me into marrying him to-morrow, or sometime."

"I know. Skip it. So it's to be the twentieth."

"At five in the afternoon," Connie said. "Write it down so you won't forget it—oh, and, darling, you'd better get your morning coat and striped trousers out of those mothballs. You know how you always reek of camphor at afternoon weddings unless you do."

"Look, now," Bill said. "No jests. You don't think I'm coming to this wedding, do you?"

"Of course you're coming to this wedding. Why, darling, how you talk! You're going to be best man."

"I'm going to be what? Listen," Bill said, "that isn't really what you think, is it? You must be losing your mind. I'm not coming anywhere near the da—— I mean the blessed wedding."

"If you're not, I'm not going to have it. I won't get married without you."

"Afraid you'll have to."

"Well, I won't," she said stormily. "Why, Bill, you're my best friend in all the world! How can you say you won't come to my wedding? I'd come to yours."

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"You'd even dance at mine," Bill said. "And that's the difference in the way we feel. And besides—it simply isn't done, that's all. It's all right to be modern, but there's no use being too-too about it. There's only room for one husband of the bride at any wedding."

"That's a stodgy attitude to take."

"Can't help it. Sorry. Mr. Crowell regrets."

The twentieth of the month was two weeks from that day. One of those weeks had passed when Bill's telephone rang one night about midnight and Connie's voice said thankfully, "Oh, there you are! Oh, I'm so glad I found you at home!"

"What's the matter? Anything wrong?"

"Everything," Connie said tragically. "Everything! Julian is beating me up, or something."

Bill did not believe this for a single instant, but nevertheless it was a fascinating notion, and he said with relish, "What do you mean, 'or something'? Is he beating you up or isn't he?"

"I don't know," said Connie. "I've never been beaten up before. But he's been pushing me around, and he slapped my face, and I don't like it. And he shook me. He absolutely shook me till my teeth rattled."

"*Julian*?" Bill said incredulously.

"Julian. Imagine!"

"You probably needed it," Bill said. "In fact I might say you undoubtedly needed it. What did you do? What brought this on?"

"I didn't do a thing," said Connie. "I was just sitting at home with a good book. It was what Julian did himself that brought it on. He got tight. He went out on a party with some of his Flying Corps friends—a

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kind of special bachelor dinner they were giving him, ahead of time. And he came home early from it—or he started home. But then he changed his mind and stopped in here and the trouble started. You really never saw anybody so tight as he is. Anybody like Julian, I mean. I mean people like Julian just never get as tight as Julian is. That day you and he got tight together was as nothing compared to this."

"Well, well," Bill said comfortingly, "what of it, after all? You have to expect him to get stinko on the night of his bachelor dinner. Personally, I admire him for being able to navigate under his own power. You should have seen me on the night of mine. You didn't, but you should've."

"It isn't the tight part I object to so much," Connie said, "—except for the way he's behaving. It's the early part. He actually left his own bachelor dinner early, so he could get some sleep. He's very careful of his sleep, it seems. He has to get eight hours, no matter what.

"I never knew that about him before," she added thoughtfully.

"Well, see here," Bill said. "This is all very interesting—but what's it to me, after all? What am I supposed to do about it?"

"You're supposed to get in a taxi and come straight over here and help me. *Please*, I mean."

"Now, listen, I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Well, because it isn't my party. I can imagine what Julian would think if I came barging in and tried to settle things."

"Why, Bill," Connie said, "you're not afraid of Julian, are you?"

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"I'm scared to death," Bill said coldly, "of course. Why do you ask?"

"Well, because I don't see why you won't come over," Connie said plaintively, "unless you're scared. I need you, and Julian really wants you. He just said so. He wants you to act as arbiter, or something."

This being the case, Bill finally dressed and went over.

The scene was chaotic. Julian had evidently been throwing things about in the living-room—a vase was shattered on the floor, and several lamps were overturned, and a window was broken. He was now sitting on a couch with his head in his hands. He looked up as Bill entered; said, "Oh, it's you"; and put his head back where it was. Connie looked small and childlike in a corner of the sofa. She was clutching one of those large woolly amusing dogs.

"Well, now, now, what's all this?" Bill began, in what he thought of as his best bedside manner.

"Maybe Julian can tell you," Connie said. "I certainly can't."

"The trouble is," Julian said, "the trouble is, she's in love with you. Always has been, always was, is now, and always was. Will be, I mean."

"Now don't say that," Bill said. "That just isn't true. Listen, Julian, go on home to bed, why don't you? Come on, now. Come along with me and I'll see you get there."

"You ask her," Julian said pointing at Connie. "Ask her if it isn't true."

Bill didn't even turn his head. "I don't have to ask her," he said. "I know better. Listen, fella——"

"I am, though," said Connie.

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"There!" said Julian, crowing it. "You heard her. She's in love with you."

"Of course I am," said Connie. "Sometimes I'm in love with you both, of course. But not at other times," she added, looking pointedly at Julian. "At other times I don't know why I ever divorced Bill at all."

"This conversation," Bill interpolated firmly, "is plain gibberish. I move we adjourn this meeting, at least until to-morrow. If we've still got anything to say about all this, we can say it then. Come on, now, Julian, let's go home."

He laid hands upon him, but found him unyielding; and a slight scuffle ensued. You should have been able to knock Julian over with a feather, in the shape he was in; and it was oddly disconcerting to find him standing as firm as a rock. Bill brought some real strength to bear, and the result was a push that was harder than he meant it to be—and this time he felt Julian give way, suddenly and alarmingly. "Now listen," he said to himself, "you shouldn't have done that, when the fellow's drunk."

Then he saw Julian toppling backward—slowly, it seemed, in quite slow motion; and he had the abstract thought that the movies were right, that that was the way they fell. The next instant he realized that the loud sound he had heard, now echoing in his ears, had been the crash of Julian's head against a metal radiator grill. At the same time he heard Connie's voice saying, "Oh, look! Oh, you've killed him."

"I have not," Bill retorted rapidly and earnestly. But he was terrified. Suddenly there was only water in his veins, and tepid stagnant water at that. He could hardly make his legs move. He knelt on one of them and listened to Julian's heart. It was pumping

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away merrily. "Sound as a nut," said Bill. "Killed him, my eye! You couldn't kill him. You can't kill a drunk anyway——" I'm babbling, he thought, and broke off.

But Julian was out cold—there was no doubt about that—and furthermore the back of his head was bleeding. "Get Miss Oliphant," Bill said tersely.

"She isn't here——"

"Where the hell is she?"

"It's her night off, and she's gone to her sister's——"

For years they had paid a nurse's salary—and now look. It was like paying insurance endlessly and then letting it lapse and having an accident. . . .

Bill's indignation served as a good antidote to fright. Swearing under his breath, he staunched the wound with his handkerchief, while Connie kept saying, "Shall I chafe his wrists? They always chafe their wrists——"

The next minutes were frantic. Bill issued crisp orders—water, towels, a basin, cotton, antiseptic—and Connie rushed about, executing the orders. Julian lay with closed eyes. . . . Bill half lugged, half dragged him across the floor to the couch, and laid him on it. . . . Connie rang up the doctor, and a central switchboard answered, and it seemed that Dr. Coombs was out of town. "Oh, now don't *say* that!" Connie wailed into the instrument. "Oh, but this is frightful! Look, there's been an accident—a really dangerous accident. My husband has just nearly killed my fiancé——"

"Hush!" Bill said sharply.

"Well, of course but not really," Connie was heard amending. "I'm probably a little bit over-excited. But it's some kind of accident, and we simply have to have a doctor. You must know a lot of other doctors,

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don't you? Well, couldn't you send one? We'll take anybody—I mean——"

The central switchboard finally agreed to try to get Dr. Wallis, Dr. Coombs's assistant; and five minutes later the sleepy voice of Dr. Wallis himself called back. He said he would be there within half an hour. . . .

There were only four beds in the house—Connie's and its twin which had been Bill's; and Miss Oliphant's virginal cot in her room; and Pat's own crib which had Pat in it. Julian was still unconscious on the couch when the doctor arrived, and the doctor said, "Let's get him to bed," and Connie said, "This way," as though she had thought the problem out. Following her, Bill and the doctor carried him down the hall to Miss Oliphant's room and put him to bed there. During this transportation he began to come to, and when they were getting his clothes off he did come to, murmuring, "And furthermore——" Bill looked at him admiringly, having always heard that everybody in such circumstances said, "Where am I?" For once in his life Julian had not said what you expected.

In another two minutes he was fully conscious, albeit still a little vague with alcohol. He asked what hit him, and Bill explained apologetically, and the doctor kept saying, "You're quite all right, Mr.—er——. Quite. It's just a bump. Head aches a little, does it? Well, I can give you something for that." Meanwhile Bill left the room and found Connie, and said, "Are there any pyjamas of mine left in this female sanctuary, by any chance? I need 'em for Julian."

"Yes," said Connie. "There's one pair." She went and got them for Bill. "But I want them back," she said, surrendering them with obvious reluctance. "They're practically all I've got to remember you by."

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For years they had paid a nurse's salary—and now look. It was like paying insurance endlessly and then letting it lapse and having an accident. . . .

Bill's indignation served as a good antidote to fright. Swearing under his breath, he staunched the wound with his handkerchief, while Connie kept saying, "Shall I chafe his wrists? They always chafe their wrists——"

The next minutes were frantic. Bill issued crisp orders—water, towels, a basin, cotton, antiseptic—and Connie rushed about, executing the orders. Julian lay with closed eyes. . . . Bill half lugged, half dragged him across the floor to the couch, and laid him on it. . . . Connie rang up the doctor, and a central switchboard answered, and it seemed that Dr. Coombs was out of town. "Oh, now don't *say* that!" Connie wailed into the instrument. "Oh, but this is frightful! Look, there's been an accident—a really dangerous accident. My husband has just nearly killed my fiancé——"

"Hush!" Bill said sharply.

"Well, of course but not really," Connie was heard amending. "I'm probably a little bit over-excited. But it's some kind of accident, and we simply have to have a doctor. You must know a lot of other doctors,

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don't you? Well, couldn't you send one? We'll take anybody—I mean——"

The central switchboard finally agreed to try to get Dr. Wallis, Dr. Coombs's assistant; and five minutes later the sleepy voice of Dr. Wallis himself called back. He said he would be there within half an hour. . . .

There were only four beds in the house—Connie's and its twin which had been Bill's; and Miss Oliphant's virginal cot in her room; and Pat's own crib which had Pat in it. Julian was still unconscious on the couch when the doctor arrived, and the doctor said, "Let's get him to bed," and Connie said, "This way," as though she had thought the problem out. Following her, Bill and the doctor carried him down the hall to Miss Oliphant's room and put him to bed there. During this transportation he began to come to, and when they were getting his clothes off he did come to, murmuring, "And furthermore——" Bill looked at him admiringly, having always heard that everybody in such circumstances said, "Where am I?" For once in his life Julian had not said what you expected.

In another two minutes he was fully conscious, albeit still a little vague with alcohol. He asked what hit him, and Bill explained apologetically, and the doctor kept saying, "You're quite all right, Mr.—er——. Quite. It's just a bump. Head aches a little, does it? Well, I can give you something for that." Meanwhile Bill left the room and found Connie, and said, "Are there any pyjamas of mine left in this female sanctuary, by any chance? I need 'em for Julian."

"Yes," said Connie. "There's one pair." She went and got them for Bill. "But I want them back," she said, surrendering them with obvious reluctance. "They're practically all I've got to remember you by."

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The doctor was ready to leave. Bill had a feeling that he ought to be made to stay and chaperon them. "Have a drink, doctor?" he suggested hospitably. "Or a bite of breakfast?" But the doctor refused, and snapped the catch of his little brown bag, and departed.

"I'd better go, too," Bill said, when the door was shut.

"Bill Crowell," Connie said, "if you leave me now, I'll never speak to you again as long as I live. Why, you can't leave me now! I never heard of such a thing. In the first place, I'd be scared—what if he took a turn for the worse, what would I do? And, besides, it isn't proper," she added primly. "It would be very compromising if Julian spent the night here. After all, we're not married yet."

So Bill stayed; and things quieted down finally. Too late it was discovered that they should have tucked Julian into one of the twin beds, and that Bill, as nurse, should have occupied the other, with Connie taking Miss Oliphant's room. As it was now, only the twin beds were available, and Bill had to sleep on the living-room couch, which was too short for him. "It seems a pity," Connie said. "In fact, it seems ridiculous. But I suppose it's only legal, isn't it? Yes, I guess so. Well —all right."

Breakfast was a strange meal. It was agreed—over Julian's protests—that his should be served to him in bed; and Connie had a card-table set up at his bedside in Miss Oliphant's room, for herself and Bill. Connie was in lounging pyjamas. Julian's bandaged head rose above a dressing-gown of Bill's which it seemed was another thing Connie had kept to remember him by. Pat was present, in a high chair. The housemaid,

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wearing that scared expression servants wear when there is a departure from household routine, tripped in and out. Connie brightly manufactured conversation, but Bill and Julian, though extremely civil to each other, contributed little. Whenever conversation flagged, Bill was prone to say, "Sure you feel all right."

"Oh, yes, thanks, old boy. Perfectly."

"Awfully sorry it happened."

"Not at all. My own fault."

"It wasn't anybody's fault," said Connie, after several sporadic repetitions of this. "In fact, nothing in life is anybody's fault particularly, I've decided. Their emotions or anything. They change their minds, and it's not their fault. More coffee, Bill?"

"No, thanks. I've got to go."

If she was going to get on to *that* subject, he'd better.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

BUT there was more in that surprising little episode than met the eye, or at least more than met Bill's eye at the time. He discovered that when he next saw Connie—while they were still, so to speak, picking up the pieces of that evening.

"You know something?" Connie said. "I meant what I said that night. I said I was still in love with you, don't you remember? I suppose you thought I said it in the heat of being mad at Julian—but I didn't. It's really true, and I've been thinking a lot about it

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lately. So look. Why don't you and I get married? Re-, I mean."

"Why, Mrs. Gregory Crowell, madam," Bill said. "What kind of Leap Year talk is this?"

"Stop grinning," Connie said. "I mean it. The whole thing was a great mistake—I see that now. I would die of boredom married to Julian, and that's that. I want to be married to you for the rest of my life."

"Oh-ho, no!" Bill said joyously. "But never! I'm a burnt child—on a big scale."

"I think you're mean," said Connie, pouting. "So this is the way it is, is it? I never proposed to a man before, and now I humble my pride and do it, and what happens? I get jilted."

"Hell of a situation."

Connie nodded. "It certainly is. I'm going home to brood and think what to do."

She went home and brooded, and after a time she called Bill up and said, "Well, all right, then. I'll woo you.

"And it isn't a bad idea, either," she declared spiritedly as Bill guffawed. "I mean it's time somebody showed you how it really ought to be done."

She began immediately. It seemed that it really ought to be done via the third person involved, if possible. She evidently thought that was worth trying, at any rate; and accordingly old Julian presented himself at Bill's apartment—he strode in, and threw his coat down, and faced his host in what appeared to be a desperate sort of way.

"You'll never guess why I'm here," he said bitterly. "You see before you a messenger. I am come to ask your hand for Connie in marriage—if you can match that."

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"Now, calm down, old man," Bill said. "Sit here. Have a drink. Tell me all about it. You're not making sense, I suppose you know that."

"Connie's influence," said Julian. "Does anything in life make sense, when she's mixed up in it? Look!" he said, getting to his feet again, windmilling with his arms. Bill did look, and he thought suddenly, "Whatever happens, she's improved him. He lacked force, and now he doesn't." And he thought perhaps the same was true of himself.

"Look!" Julian said again. "Listen! I go to call on my fiancée and my future step-daughter—bearing gifts for them both. The gift for my fiancée is a jewelled pin that caught her eye the other day in a shop window when I was with her. She opens it, exclaims over it, admires it very much—and then looks sad and shakes her head and closes the box and says, 'But I can't take it, Julian. I can't take any expensive presents from you any more, and, furthermore, I'll have to return the ones you've already given me—because I'm breaking our engagement.'"

Bill made a sympathetic sound in his throat, still watching old Julian's face. . . .

"So then we had a talk," Julian went on, "and she explained. And it's just as I've thought, all along—she's really in love with you, not me. She was afraid to tell me, for fear it would break me all up—but, as a matter of fact, it didn't. Not too much. I guess I must have been more or less expecting it all along, and in a way it was a relief to get the blow and get it over with. So she isn't going to marry me, after all. Instead she wants to marry you. She sent me over here to ask you to. She said she asked you herself the other day, but you refused."

"Of course I did."

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"That was on account of me, though," Julian said. "You and I both know that. And Connie knows it, too. In fact, she said it. And that's why I'm here—to tell you it's all right. I understand. You go ahead and marry her and forget about me. That's the way it should be."

"You're certainly being very sporting about the whole thing," Bill said warmly.

"Well, I was braced for it," said Julian, "more or less. And, after all, I've always been an interloper in this picture. I never had any business in it at all, as a matter of fact. And I never in the world could have coped with Connie—I know that now. I'll always love her, but I'm helpless where she's concerned, and I always would have been. You're the man who can handle her—and the only one who ever could."

"Yeah. I've done a fine job. Sensational, in fact."

"Better than you think. Better than you think. I know. Well, and so there it is," he concluded. "After all, the main thing is for Connie to get what she wants, and be happy. I think you and I both agree on that."

"We seem to."

"And Connie agrees with us on it."

"That she does."

They both smiled faintly.

"She made it very clear," Julian remembered aloud. "I might even say characteristically clear. She said to me, 'I want you to go and ask Bill for his hand in marriage. You know,' she said, '—like Priscilla and John Alden and Captain Miles Standish.'"

"I see," Bill said. "That makes me Priscilla. Well, well, well."

Later, when Julian had gone, he sat musing for a

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while, and grinning to himself; and then he rang up Connie and talked to her—still looking merry, but sounding gruff.

"Julian was just here," he said, "on his incredible errand. Say, what the hell is this?"

"It's Stage One of my wooing," Connie said. "Didn't it work? Oh, darling, don't tell me it didn't work."

"Of course it didn't."

"Well," Connie said, "I didn't really expect it would. But still, I had hopes. Oh, well, then. I'll have to think of something else. Try, try again.

"But I'm warning you now," she added. "You might just as well give in first as last. It will save us both an awful lot of trouble."

The wooing went on, and there was surely nothing like it in the history of the world. There was a lunatic month of it, and a little more. Crazy flowers arrived, and silk pyjamas in wild designs, and a shower curtain with naughty pictures on it, and a broad man-sized brass wedding ring from the ten-cent store. Champagne arrived, and a package marked "Love incense"—complete with a little burner—from a shop in Chinatown. One day he came home to find a small group of musicians gathered at his apartment door, with their instruments; and they played him in to the strains of "I Love You Truly." . . . "Thanks, boys," Bill said. "That'll be enough. You can go home now." But it seemed they couldn't, they had been hired to play the same tune for two hours straight, and so they did. At first he left them outside the door, but in the end he had them all in and gave them drinks, and they took turns among themselves, half of them drinking while the other half played.

The most unexpected and embarrassing things

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happened. Once he was having lunch at the Sky Club—no women allowed, all business men—when a birthday cake was suddenly brought in and set down before him. It said, "Sweets to the Sweet" in curlicued pink icing, and it had candles burning on it. He figured out that there was one for every year he and Connie had been married. And once when he left the office he was followed by a little man who waited until he had squeezed through the door of a crowded five-o'clock north-bound underground train, and then squeezed in afterwards and presented him with a vast bouquet of chrysanthemums, the reddish ones, tied with a big bow of rust-coloured ribbon, and hung with a card like a placard. "Come home, all is forgiven," the card said, for all the world to see.

Unseasonable valentines arrived in his office mail, and were opened by the secretary he shared with two of the other brokers; and so did amorous telegrams, and once a box of heart-shaped candies with pink mottoes on them, and once a marked copy of a leaflet put out by a matrimonial bureau. "See page 83," was scribbled across the cover in Connie's handwriting, and Bill looked in fear and trembling, and—sure enough—there it was. A certain block of type was there, and although it made no mention of Connie's name or his, the text was unmistakable. "Beautiful young divorcée," the text said, "brunette, grey eyes, long eyelashes (natural), lovely figure (size 14), flawless complexion, small hands and feet, considered gorgeous by her friends, wishes to marry handsome good-natured grass widower initials W. S. C. Jr. Will accept no substitutes. Has every charm to offer him, including sunny disposition, happy home, one daughter three years old, and independent means. Will make him perfect wife, of steady, settled, loyal, ever-loving type. Communicate immediately."

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He was still contemplating retorts of a suitable nature when Connie hired a sky-writer to transcribe LOVE TO BILL on the blue midday sky above New York. He would have liked to pretend that he missed seeing that, but as a matter of fact no one in New York missed seeing it, and Connie had made sure he wouldn't by telephoning him that morning and saying, "Be on the street at one o'clock to-day, darling. And keep your chin up."

He didn't think she could do worse—but it seemed she could. Oh, much worse. The very next day she bounced out at him from a crowd, proffering an autograph book, and trying at the same time to tear a button off his coat. This was in front of his office building, as he was returning from lunch, and it was just one of those things—people seemed to spring up out of the sidewalk, by the hundred. Breathless voices said, "Who is it?" and others replied that it must be some movie star, and everybody said, "Let's see——" and everybody began pushing. In half a minute there was a tight little knot of people round Bill and Connie, and the tight little knot was only the core of an ever-increasing mob. "Now look what you've done, you little fool!" Bill muttered under his breath, but Connie affected not to hear him, and he hadn't dared to make it loud enough for anyone else.

By this time other people were proffering things to be autographed—envelopes, the margins of newspapers, small paper parcels, anything they had. The question of his identity was still a moot one, but evidently no one cared, as long as Connie was making it clear that he was somebody. "Sign mine first!" she insisted, and he seized the book from her and scribbled, "I'll get you for this" and handed it back. To the crowd he was saying, "Look, this is just a gag. It's really my

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wife. I'm no celebrity, I tell you. I'm just a stock broker and I work in this building. Now will you break up and go along quietly?"

Connie got away from it all before he did. She produced a pair of nail-scissors and cut a button off his coat and vanished into the crowd with it, leaving Bill still embattled. A policeman was advancing to see what was what, and Bill grinned at him in a sickly way and made deprecating gestures. A woman in a red hat and stringy hair was clinging to his arm, having taken Connie's place; and two urchins on the left were peering searchingly up into his face; and a voice behind him was saying, "Must be one of them directors—leastwise, I never seen him before." Two other voices were debating the question of whether or not he had played opposite Ginger Rogers in that last picture. . . . Another voice, more frank, said firmly, "Well, whoever he is, he ain't so much." At the owner of this voice Bill looked round gratefully. "You've got it," he said. "All the rest of you people are nuts. . . ."

"Give in?" Connie said next time she saw him.

"Hell, no," Bill said. "You're not bothering me. Go right ahead. Do your damnedest."

"Coming right up," said Connie, with a really baleful gleam in her eye.

That was on a Wednesday. On Friday she rang up just as he was leaving the office for the day, and—speaking in a special and funereal voice which he gathered was intended for listeners in her own apartment—said to him, "Bill, instead of going home, would you come up here for a little while? As soon as you can? It's important."

"I'll bet," Bill said shortly. "It's probably a three-ring circus—with me as the man on the flying trapeze.

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You warned me, remember? Wild horses couldn't drag me up there."

"But this is different," she said with dignity. "This is your father and mother."

"Who?"

"Father and Mother Crowell," Connie repeated patiently. "They arrived in New York this morning, to visit Pat and me for a few days. And naturally they want to see their own son."

He arrived by underground in less than half an hour. Connie opened the door to him, wearing a demure black dress, and a pale make-up, and a sweetly sad expression. This was plainly the injured wife; and Bill's parents, who had always adored her—who had grieved over the divorce almost inconsolably when it happened—were now only all too obviously on her side. They sat in arm-chairs, looking homey. They were plump little people, blue-eyed and smiling and usually genial like Bill himself; they had small red broken veins in their cheeks to make their faces rosy, and pouter-pigeon figures from much good eating. Bill's father smoked cigars, and his mother crocheted, and she was crocheting now. They both looked unnaturally grave, however, and they greeted Bill with a kind of reproachful restraint, as they used to do when he was little and had committed some youthful crime. "Son," his father said merely, after clearing his throat and shaking hands. His mother kissed him, and she even gave his shoulder a little pat, to show him that—whatever happened—she was his mother always.

"Well," Bill said heartily, "this is a surprise. Say, this is simply fine! Why on earth didn't you tell me you were coming?"

"I sent for them," Connie said, as the parents

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hesitated. "And I asked them not to tell you. I thought you might try to keep them from coming."

"Why in hell should I?"

"Well, because," said Connie, with her lashes lowered, "because of the circumstances."

He had his second good look at her then, and he saw that the make-up seemed paler than ever, and that her eyes were shadowed. She actually looked as though she had been crying.

Little devil, he thought. There were simply no lengths to which she would not go. But at the same time he was aware that this trip would be a great pleasure to his parents, that he hadn't had them here often enough, and that Connie would give them a beautiful time. So there wasn't anything he could object to about it—except for this act she was putting on. He decided to spike that right now, at the very start.

He mixed the rye drink that his father liked best—and while he worked he talked. "Now listen," he said, "let's all take our back hair down, right here and now. I don't know what Connie's been telling you, but whatever it is, it probably isn't the case. In fact I can tell it isn't, from her expression."

She didn't condescend to answer that. Instead she looked significantly at Bill's parents, saying very plainly by means of her eyes and eyebrows, "There! You see?"

"Connie says," said Bill's father, "that she wants to re-marry you, and that you won't consent. I can't believe that of you, son, but she says it's true."

"Certainly it's true," Bill said, "—but not in the way you think. It's—well, I mean—kind of a gag that she and I have. She's got no business trying to make you believe it's serious."

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"Well, but it is," said Connie wanly. "It is with me. In fact it's tragic. As I told them."

"Connie loves you, dear," his mother said, "with all her heart."

"I worship him," said Connie. "But he doesn't love me any more, and that's the whole trouble."

"Sure I do," Bill said. "I've never stopped. But this is something else——"

"It's probably some*body* else," she said. "It must be. I've tried and tried to get him back—but nothing works. He just won't come back."

Bill's father cleared his throat again, and drank deeply of his rye. He looked on the verge of tears, and so did Bill's mother, who now said—leaning forward tensely, and abandoning her crocheting—"And think of Pat, dear. Darling little Pat. Think what a dreadful thing it is you're doing to her."

"Listen!" Bill said. "This is all crazy. Let me explain it, will you?"

"I only wish you could," said Connie. "Oh, please do explain it. I've wondered for so long."

"Hush, now," Bill said to her. "You keep out of this. I'm not even sure you ought not to leave the room."

"But it's about me! Certainly I've got a right to hear it."

"Certainly she has, son," Bill's father said.

"Yes, William," said his mother.

The explanation was a struggle. They were another generation—and besides, he didn't want to seem to blame her too much, or show her up too much. They wouldn't understand her. If he said that, in the first place, the divorce had been a kind of joke, and that this was the end of it, the rounding-out . . . they wouldn't understand. He did the best he could, but still he

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felt that he had made a botch of it. His parents were still looking tenderly at Connie.

So there was only one thing left to do—he had to turn the tables on her somehow, and he knew a way. "Besides," he said, going smoothly on, "there are two sides to every picture. Nobody knows what I've suffered myself. I just don't talk about it."

He looked noble, and in the little silence they all looked at him. "'Suffered'——?" said his mother, with a quaver in her voice; and Connie said indignantly, "Why, Bill!"

"Better explain that, son," his father said.

Bill took a deep breath, and he thought, *Here I go.* To his own surprise he found that this was completely serious. A lot depended on it—everything depended on it. "Well, it's like this," he said. "I've never been boss in my own house—and I'm never going to live in it again till I am. As a matter of fact, it really hasn't ever been my own house, thanks to Connie's damn money. She's got too much of it, and it's always made her too independent—and too spoiled. She wants what she wants, and when it turned out that I couldn't always give it to her, she'd go and get it anyway. And I couldn't blame her for that, and I still don't—but it isn't a state of affairs that I want to resume all over again. If I ever remarried Connie, it would have to be on an entirely new basis. She'd have to keep to my scale of living, and be content with that. And she never would be."

"What makes you think I never would be?" Connie interrupted at that point. "Certainly I would be, if it means so much to you. I didn't know it did. You've never taken a stand like this before."

"I know," Bill said to her. "Don't rub it in."

That was like an aside, and he went right on. He had found that he got along better by speaking as though

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Connie were not there. " And she'd have to grow up," he said to the room in general, " and she wouldn't like that. She's spent her life trying not to, and I don't suppose she could change now. And she'd have to give up a lot of her funny little friends—those fugitives from a kindergarten we've had around here for so many years." He felt himself warming to his theme, and he stood up and began pacing. " And those theories," he said, with a grimace. " No more of those—not another word." His outspread hand swooped through the air, palm down ; and he suddenly bellowed, " Not *ever*."

" All right," said Connie.

It took him by surprise, sounding so complaisant—and even so contented—and he wheeled upon her, demanding, " ' All right ' what ? "

" All right to all of that," said Connie. " Go on. What else ? "

He could hear the little stir that was caused by his parents relaxing thankfully ; and his mother said, " There, now you see, William ? Connie's perfectly willing to do everything you want her to."

" No, no," Bill said. " It wouldn't be Connie."

" It wouldn't be the old Connie," said Connie. " This is the new job. Look, I'm a reformed character. If you don't believe me, I tell you what I'll do. We can have a trial remarriage and if I don't do what I say—I mean if I don't do what you say—then *you* can divorce *me*. I mean all the shoes are on the other foot now, don't you see ? Or feet. No, foot. Well, anyway."

Bill looked at her, and he thought that she would never change, and then he thought that she had changed a little ; she just couldn't talk any other way. She touched him and he couldn't help it, so when he spoke his voice was rough, to conceal the fact. " All right, I suppose there's no other way out of this labyrinth."

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He looked noble, and in the little silence they all looked at him. "'Suffered'——?" said his mother, with a quaver in her voice; and Connie said indignantly, "Why, Bill!"

"Better explain that, son," his father said.

Bill took a deep breath, and he thought, *Here I go.* To his own surprise he found that this was completely serious. A lot depended on it—everything depended on it. "Well, it's like this," he said. "I've never been boss in my own house—and I'm never going to live in it again till I am. As a matter of fact, it really hasn't ever been my own house, thanks to Connie's damn money. She's got too much of it, and it's always made her too independent—and too spoiled. She wants what she wants, and when it turned out that I couldn't always give it to her, she'd go and get it anyway. And I couldn't blame her for that, and I still don't—but it isn't a state of affairs that I want to resume all over again. If I ever remarried Connie, it would have to be on an entirely new basis. She'd have to keep to my scale of living, and be content with that. And she never would be."

"What makes you think I never would be?" Connie interrupted at that point. "Certainly I would be, if it means so much to you. I didn't know it did. You've never taken a stand like this before."

"I know," Bill said to her. "Don't rub it in."

That was like an aside, and he went right on. He had found that he got along better by speaking as though

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Connie were not there. " And she'd have to grow up," he said to the room in general, " and she wouldn't like that. She's spent her life trying not to, and I don't suppose she could change now. And she'd have to give up a lot of her funny little friends—those fugitives from a kindergarten we've had around here for so many years." He felt himself warming to his theme, and he stood up and began pacing. " And those theories," he said, with a grimace. " No more of those—not another word." His outspread hand swooped through the air, palm down ; and he suddenly bellowed, " Not *ever*."

" All right," said Connie.

It took him by surprise, sounding so complaisant—and even so contented—and he wheeled upon her, demanding, " ' All right ' what ? "

" All right to all of that," said Connie. " Go on. What else ? "

He could hear the little stir that was caused by his parents relaxing thankfully ; and his mother said, " There, now you see, William ? Connie's perfectly willing to do everything you want her to."

" No, no," Bill said. " It wouldn't be Connie."

" It wouldn't be the old Connie," said Connie. " This is the new job. Look, I'm a reformed character. If you don't believe me, I tell you what I'll do. We can have a trial remarriage and if I don't do what I say—I mean if I don't do what you say—then *you* can divorce *me*. I mean all the shoes are on the other foot now, don't you see ? Or feet. No, foot. Well, anyway."

Bill looked at her, and he thought that she would never change, and then he thought that she had changed a little ; she just couldn't talk any other way. She touched him and he couldn't help it, so when he spoke his voice was rough, to conceal the fact. " All right, I suppose there's no other way out of this labyrinth."

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Bill's mother said, "There, dear. I'm so glad;" and Mr. Crowell coughed and smiled and finished his rye. The most surprising thing of all about it was that Connie said absolutely nothing; she sat there and looked at him with an expression that he had never quite seen before. He wanted to say something light and easy, but he couldn't.

It was ten minutes before the atmosphere was back to normal, and by that time they had made plans and Bill was going to get a licence right away, and the family was going to stay and see them married.

When it was all settled, Connie got his hat and coat and they started for the door. They were half-way there when he remembered something more, and he stopped and pointed his finger at Connie. "Just one thing I forgot," he said. "If I marry you this time, there's going to be no 'trial' about it, understand? You're going to be trapped for life. No more divorces."

"Goody," Connie said.

They were married five days later, which was as soon as they could be. Connie wore something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue—although she forgot about it till the last minute, and there was a little trouble assembling those items. All her clothes were new, and she wore an antique bracelet of Bill's mother's, and she borrowed a pin from his father—but the something blue was a problem. She settled it on the way to church by taking a small snapshot of Julian out of her handbag and tucking it down the neck of her dress. "Poor Julian, he couldn't be bluer," she said, "so I'll wear him."

When the ceremony and the wedding supper were both over, and Bill and Connie had dropped the parents at their hotel, Bill said, "Now, look here. It cost you several thousand dollars, all told, to divorce me—and

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it cost me two dollars plus a little to remarry you. Now which of us was smart?"

He thought he had her there. But she merely smiled, and looked mysterious; and said, "Me."

THE END

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